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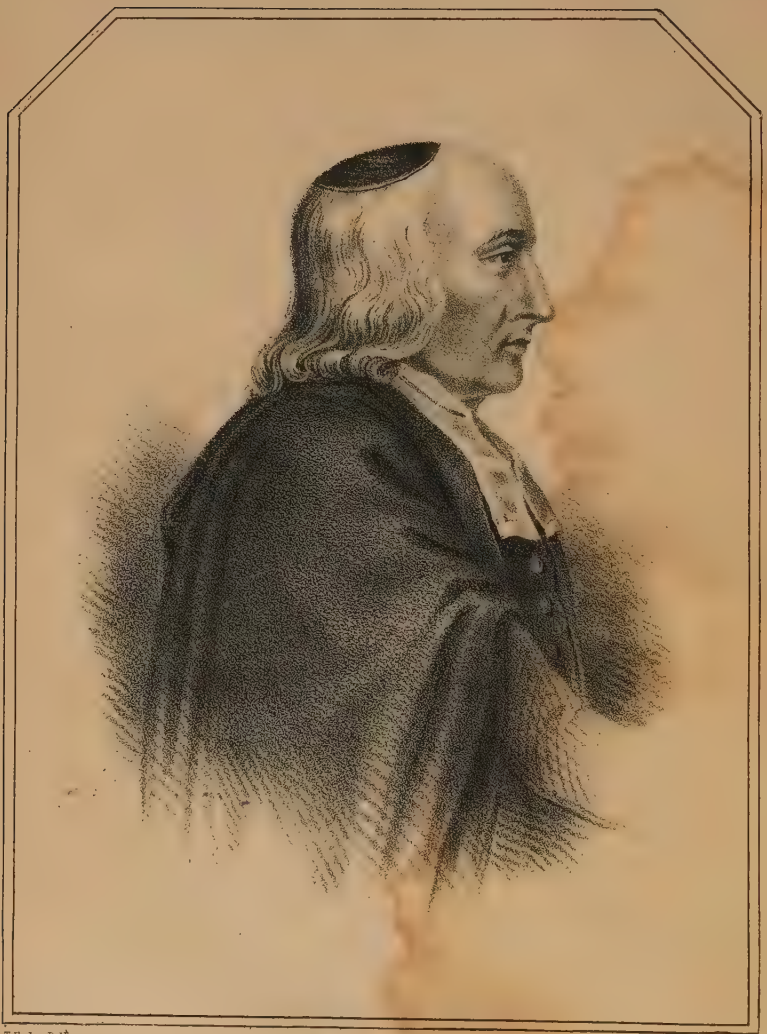

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PERE BOURDALOUE. S.I.

Published by J, DUFFY Anglesea. Sᵗ Dublin.

SERMONS,

AND

MORAL DISCOURSES,

ON THE

IMPORTANT DUTIES OF CHRISTIANITY.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF

PERE BOURDALOUE, S.I.

BY THE REV. A. CARROLL, S.J.

PREACH THE WORD: BE INSTANT IN SEASON, OUT OF SEASON; REPROVE, ENTREAT, REBUKE IN ALL PATIENCE AND DOCTRINE.—2 *Tim.* c. iv. v. 2.

SECOND EDITION.

VOL. I.

DUBLIN:
PUBLISHED BY JAMES DUFFY,
25, ANGLESEA STREET.
M.DCCC.XLIII.

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PREFACE.

BOURDALOUE was, unquestionably, the most distinguished ornament of the pulpit that ever France produced.—Formed by nature for a public speaker, and gifted with all the powers requisite to accomplish an orator, no one could appear to greater advantage before a Christian audience. His aspect was good, and his voice manly, full, and melodious. Action, guided by feeling and reflection, added grace to his utterance; and energy, suitable to the importance and meaning of that which he discoursed on, gave uncommon spirit and life to his diction. Joined to a distinct and accurate elocution, he possessed an astonishing volubility of speech; so that in all the most interesting parts of his subject his eloquence rolled with amazing force and impetuosity. Conscious that he appeared as Christ's ambassador, and declared to the people the will of his master, concerning an affair of no less consequence than their eternal welfare—he always demeaned himself with becoming dignity, and commanded respect by a proper deportment.

With talents like these, a public speaker never fails of applause. Correspondent with the delivery, whatever it is, will almost infallibly be the effect of a popular speech.

Carelessness and insipidity beget indifference and disgust, but zeal and spirit create warmth and satisfaction. As mankind in general are easily dazzled, they are not qualified to estimate a discourse in proportion to its propriety and intrinsic worth. It is not then to be wondered at, that Bourdaloue was heard as he really was, with the utmost attention and silent recollection, and that his audience from time to time should give extraordinary marks of their approbation, and of the impression made on their minds.

But this great man had other qualifications equally necessary for a preacher of the Word—an intimate union with God in prayer, much reading and reflection, experience among all ranks of people, a thorough insight into the human heart, strong feelings, a full possession of the affections he meant to infuse into others, and a deep penetration, which enabled him to find out in all his disquisitions what was most consonant to reason and truth ; and this last was his most distinguishing characteristic.

Accordingly, the excellence of his sermons lies not in some shining and laboured passages, but in the chain of argument, and uniformity of strength, which link and support the different parts and their ramifications. A discourse of his is like a noble structure, of which we cannot form a right judgment from one or two apartments, much less from a single ornament. Every thing he says directly tends to the point in hand, for he never

in the least digresses from his subject, or loses sight one moment of his leading proposition. He pitches upon one capital, or terrible, or perceptive truth, which he elucidates and proves by the divine documents of the inspired penmen, the convictive arguments of the ancient fathers, and the pious thoughts of ascetic writers. His emotions are strong and pathetic, his sentiments lively and apposite, his reflections judicious and fraught with good sense, and his reasoning energetic, perspicuous, and conclusive.—Though he is very accurate in the measure of his periods, and very attentive to the consonance and cadence of their different members, yet he no where sacrifices sense to sound, or solidity of argument to harmony of words. His style is perfectly adapted to his subject, for he knows when to be plain and artless, and when to be rhetorical and figurative. It should seem indeed, that nothing was wanting in order to warm the passions, convince the understanding, and work a speedy and thorough conversion in the heart of a Christian.

The pulpit, which was designed to explain the Word of God and promote godliness, he never prostitutes to the vile purposes of party or slander. Ringleaders of schism and broachers of heresy he seldom mentions ; and never but when it naturally falls in with his subject so to do. On these occasions, we find spirit without asperity, and argument without acrimony. Nevertheless—a fast friend to truth—he is not afraid, though a court preacher, of offending the delicacy of his hearers by too plain and

harsh an expression ; rightly judging that it would be betraying his ministry to disguise, by circumlocution, the great and eternal truths which he knows it is incumbent on him to place in the clearest point of light.

It hath, it is true, been asserted by persons of refined taste that the best sermon is unadorned, and congenial to the simplicity of the Gospel which it explains ; that the usual display of method and regularity, by divisions and subdivisions, savours too much of art and defeats in some measure the end for which it is intended ; that a preacher ought not to embellish and set off evangelical truths with ascititious ornaments and trappings borrowed from pagan oratory: and by consequence that the cause of religion and the reformation of manners might be furthered and supported more effectually than they are, by a mode of preaching different from that which hath long obtained, and which Bourdaloue followed. They allow, indeed, that all the powers of eloquence ought to be exerted by the preachers of the Word ; but they are so far from thinking simplicity incompatible with true, masculine, affecting eloquence, that they look upon it as one of its most powerful constituents. Parade and ostentation, not method and perspicuity, they could wish were banished from the pulpit for ever.

This fault, however, one would think should be forgotten among so many perfections, and such excellent qualifications as Bourdaloue possessed. And if we consider the necessity he was under of complying with an

established and inveterate custom, it will be greatly extenuated, perhaps wholly excused. This is not the only instance in which a bad custom hath overruled reason and common sense. Be that as it may, his divisions and subdivisions have great beauty, being natural and exact, and ingeniously contrived. But if the reader shall observe in these discourses any thing low or mean, flat or insipid, forced or far-fetched, affected or inflated; if he shall not discover a genuine warmth, a zeal for religion and sound doctrine; if the origin of evil be not laid open, and the true means set forth by which it may be removed; if the principles of the Gospel be not carefully applied to the condemnation of vice and advancement of virtue; if any thing shall occur unbecoming, or beneath the dignity of the pulpit or the sacred ministry, more than hath already been explained or hinted at, he is desired to set it to the account of the translator, not of Bourdaloue.

It was found necessary to employ some few theological terms in a different sense from that in which they are used by the generality of English writers: to instance only in the word contrition—it is generally supposed to mean no more than a vehement natural grief in the sinner, arising from a consciousness of his having perpetrated a grievous crime. But no kind of grief can with propriety be called contrition, which is not owing to a supernatural infusion of divine grace into the sinner's soul, and to the sinner's free co-operation with it.

The ingenious compliments to the King of France, which, in the original, are tacked to some of these discourses, are here left out; and for this the translator need scarce apologise. But an apology may be necessary for his having undertaken a task to which, very likely, it will be found that he was unequal. It were, indeed to be wished that some abler pen had undertaken it upon a larger and more comprehensive plan. However, the translator flatters himself that whatever defects may be observed in, or objections made to what is here offered, the pains, at least, which he hath taken will meet with some indulgence.

SERMONS.

SERMON I.

ON THE BIRTH OF CHRIST.

"*The angel said unto them: Fear not; for behold I bring you tidings of great joy, that shall be to all people: for this day is born to you, in the city of David, a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.*" LUKE ii.

THUS spoke the angel of the Lord; but he spoke to shepherds, inoffensive men, who, estranged from the world, and tending their flocks, were as innocent of life, as they were poor and obscure. He brought them tidings of a Saviour, who, born in a stable, came to do honour to their condition, by making choice of their poverty; and who, by laying aside, to save them, the majesty of God, appeared in a manner clothed in the form not only of a man, but of a man unknown like them, and in all things but sin perfectly like them. I am not, therefore, surprised that he should say, Fear not. For what had they to fear,[1] (says St. Chrysostom,) in a mystery which teemed with consolation—in a mystery which afforded them numberless opportunities of praising God—in a mystery which displayed the happiness of their station, and thereby made their wants, I do not say supportable, but desirable and pleasing? I am not, I say, surprised that the angel should accost them in these words: "Behold I bring you tidings of great joy; because this day is born to you a Saviour."

But, Christians, notwithstanding the obligation I am under of

fulfilling the duties annexed to my ministry, I am far from enjoying the advantage which the angel of the Lord enjoyed. I bring you tidings, like him, that the Saviour is born; but I doubt, I bring them to an audience to whom they will be no solid motive of consolation. I bring them to those, who, though Christians by profession, are filled with fantastic and worldly notions. What then shall I say to them, O Lord! and how shall I display the stupendous mystery of your humility and poverty? Shall I say, Fear not? This, in the supposition I make of their state, would be leading them into error. Shall I bid them fear? I should depart from the spirit of the mystery we are celebrating, and from the comfortable thoughts it is wont to inspire, and with which it should inspire the most profligate sinners. Shall I bid them be afflicted, while gladness spreads her influence over the Christian world? Shall I say, be comforted, while at the sight of the Saviour who condemns their maxims, they have so much reason to be grieved and afflicted? I will say, O my God! both the one and the other. I will say, be afflicted; and I will say, be comforted; for I bring tidings which ought to excite both fear and joy. These two sentiments, so contrary in appearance, are the abstract and substance of the following discourse.

It was the will of Christ Jesus to appear in the world as an object of contradiction; and by an impenetrable secret of divine Providence, to be "set for the ruin and resurrection of many." Luke ii. The whole life of this God-man was taken up in fulfilling this prediction. It is not then without reason that I propose his birth as a just motive of fear and joy: of fear, by considering him, Saviour as he is, as the ruin of the unrighteous; of joy, by looking on him as the resurrection of sinners, who, by reforming their lives, become the elect of God.

I may say that the business of salvation consists in rightly managing these two opposite, but not clashing sentiments of joy and fear; and for this reason, holy David, instructing the great and powerful, for whom he knew, by divine inspiration, that this sage lesson was particularly needful, said to them in a manner not less surprising, than judicious and sensible: "Serve ye the Lord with fear, and rejoice with him in trembling." Ps. ii. Why tremble, (says St. Chrysostom,) if I must rejoice in him; and why rejoice in him, if I must tremble? Because, (replies this holy doctor,) a man, in respect to God and salvation, whether righteous or

wicked, should entertain no joy, which is not blended with a respectful fear; or any fear, however respectful, which is not accompanied by a holy joy. For, according to the most exact rules of religion, we are not permitted to fear God's judgments, without confiding in him; or to confide in him, without fearing his judgments.

Now I maintain that the mystery of our Saviour's birth, thoroughly comprehended, and duly considered, is, of all the mysteries in the Christian religion, the best calculated to stir up in our hearts this salutary fear, together with this solid and internal joy. I maintain, that the sight of this Saviour, lying in a manger, affords us extremely powerful motives to the one and the other. First, then, are you one of those, who, seduced by false maxims, quit the way of salvation for the way of the world? Be afraid; because this mystery will lay open to you afflicting truths. Secondly, are you, or would you be, one of those, who seek Almighty God in spirit and in truth? Be glad; because this mystery will discover to you infinite treasures of grace and mercy.

PART I. The salvation of man must derive its origin from the fear of the Lord; and charity itself, how perfect soever, if it were not founded in the fear of God's judgments, would neither be solid nor infallible. It is with reason, therefore, that, proclaiming to-day the great mystery of salvation, which is the birth of our Redeemer, I should point out and ascertain the most powerful motives to this wholesome fear. Fear then, ye men of the world; that is, ye who, intoxicated with the spirit of the world, lead a life conformable to its laws and maxims: fear, because the very Saviour, who, you think, is born to you, Saviour as he is, and however universal, is perhaps, for you, the reverse of a Saviour: fear, because he is a Saviour, but a Saviour who comes, perhaps, to be your shame and condemnation: fear, because this Saviour, incapable of indifference, if he doth not save you, must necessarily ruin you. Dreadful reflection! but which, my brethren, you may turn to advantage, by ruminating on them in the true spirit of humility and compunction.

A Saviour, I say, is born unto you; but a Saviour, that, seeing the notions with which you are prepossessed, is possibly for you the reverse of a Saviour. You wish he would save you, but you are not solicitous he should free you from sin; you wish he would save you, but you expect it shall give you no kind of trouble;

you wish he would save you, but you would not have it be by the means he hath appointed. Now all these are so many contradictions; and if you have any sentiments of religion left, these enormous contradictions are cogent reasons why you should be seized with dread and horror. Think not that I exaggerate them, in order to disturb you with needless apprehensions: be rather afraid that my expressions are too weak to convey a just idea of them in their full force.

1st. You want him to exert his saving power in your regard; but, at the same time, by a strange opposition of sentiment and conduct, you are not solicitous that he free you from sin. For this, nevertheless, and for this only, he commenced a Saviour; a quality, which he cannot, with respect to you, in any manner assume, but inasmuch as he disengages you from passions and bad habits—those origins of sin, of which you are the slaves. If he free you not from them; and if, far from desiring to be freed from their dominion, you be infatuated with your slavery—use what arguments you please, this divine Saviour, although eminently such, is no more for you than a nominal Saviour; and all the adoration you pay him to-day, is delusion and hypocrisy. No reasoning, according to the principles of that Christianity which you profess, can be more consequentially deduced than this: "Thou shalt call his name Jesus," says the angel to Joseph; and he gives for reason, "because he shall save his people from their sins."—Matt. i. Observe, (says St. Chrysostom,) that he doth not say, thou shalt call his name Jesus, because he will deliver his afflicted people from the temporal calamities they have been long groaning under. That would have been suitable to the saviours of old, who were but types of this, and delegates from God to that gross and carnal people, the Jews. The Jesus whose nativity we now commemorate, was sent for a more exalted and holy mission: a Redeemer more essential and perfect was decreed for us. The great evils we were to have been cured of, were more dangerous and more mortal, than those which God's people underwent in Egypt; and it was for these, (says St. Chrysostom,) we stood in need of a Saviour. He comes not to redeem us from the adversities and misfortunes of the present life: we should be unworthy the profession and title of Christians, if we made that the criterion of his grace and power of saving us: he was not promised us upon those terms. But he comes to deliver us from the corruptions, the irre-

gularities, and the errors of the world: from the yoke of our passions; from the tyranny of sin, by which we are enslaved; from the concupiscence of the flesh, which overrules our reason; from an overweening opinion of our own worth, suggested by self-love and the spirit of pride; from criminal connexions, hatred and aversions, corroding rancour, and malignant jealousy. These are our enemies; and none but a God had the power of rescuing us from such captivity. This it is that makes him take flesh and be born, "because he shall save his people from their sins."

Now tell me, Christians, have you hitherto understood it, and do you still understand it, in this manner? Let each candidly examine himself in the presence of God. Where is the ambitious man, who, looking on his ambition as the wound of his soul, desires in good earnest to be thoroughly cured? Where is the voluptuous man, who, truly afflicted at his unhappy situation, wishes efficaciously, and as his sovereign good, to be freed from his passion? Where is the avaricious man, who, ashamed of his injustice, sincerely and from his heart detests his iniquity? Where is the woman, who, listening to religion, hath a horror of vanity, and thinks of extirpating her self-love? From what passion, from what vicious and ruling inclination hath this divine Saviour as yet delivered you? By what then do you know him to be a Saviour? And if he be a Saviour, by what mark do you pretend to know that he is yours? What hath he by your own means performed in your regard? Now, as I perceive that you are so ill disposed, should I not prevaricate, did I declare to you his coming as a cause of joy? And to speak as a faithful minister of the gospel, ought I not to tell you what in fact I tell you? Undeceive yourselves, and bewail your woful situation; for, while enamoured with the world, you obstinately persist in such criminal dispositions, though the Saviour be born, no more advantage accrues to you from his sacred birth, than if were not born. Alas! Christians, give me leave, in this place, to make a melancholy, but affecting and edifying reflection. We bewail the unhappy fate of the Jews, who, though Christ Jesus was born among them, have reaped no manner of benefit from that inestimable favour, and are those of the whole world who are the least advantaged by his happy nativity. We pity their case, and condemn their folly; not reflecting, that their condition, or rather wretchedness, is nearly similar to our own. For in what consisted the reprobation of the

Jews? In representing to themselves, instead of the Messiah, whom God had willed, and who was necessary for them—one, according to the figments of their own head, and agreeable to the desires of their own heart; in esteeming as nothing him who came to deliver their souls from bondage, and turning their thoughts, unattentive to a future state, on an imaginary restorer of their fortunes and estates; in confounding together these two kinds of salvation—or, to speak more properly, in having rejected the one, and unprofitably flattering themselves with hopes of the other, by which they were frustrated of the one and the other, and effectually cut off from the blessing of redemption.

From this source arose their ruin; and from what other doth ours arise? Although we do not, like them, expect another Messiah, but believe in him whom heaven hath sent, is it not true (let us own it and blush) that, to judge by our conduct, we are involved, with regard to our Saviour, in the same darkness which surrounded the Jews, and still surrounds them, relatively to the Messiah, whom they have long expected, and in whom they hope. My meaning is this: we invoke Jesus Christ as our God and Redeemer; but we invoke him in the spirit in which the Jews would invoke him. We pressingly invoke him for temporal blessings; but are supinely heedless as to eternal rewards. Doth adversity oppress us? Is a persecution raised against us? Is our fortune, or reputation, or health in danger? Then have we recourse to the God who saved us, to the God we are desirous again should save us; but from what?—from the trouble which we have been brought into—from the disorder which afflicts us—from the misfortune which brings us low. These are the evils which awaken our fervour, which make us attend with assiduity to prayer, and from which we beg with earnestness, and even with impatience, to be preserved or delivered. But we are in the state and irregularity of habitual sin, which brings death to the soul? We hardly reflect that there is an all-powerful Saviour to withdraw us from it; scarce do we make application to him, and cry out with the prophet: "Hasten, O Lord! lift me up from the abyss into which I am fallen." Insensible to the necessity in which we are entangled, we enjoy tranquillity and a peaceful mind. What do I say? Far from looking out for a proper remedy, perhaps we dread it; perhaps we shun it; perhaps our perverseness and malignity of heart are such, that our very sin gives us a secret joy,

and in the bottom of our hearts we applaud ourselves for it, or even place our glory in it. If this be the case, we are in our hearts as much Jews as the Jews themselves. And if their infidelity be compared with ours, ours is more culpable, as we despise a Saviour in whom we believe; but they sinned against him because they knew him not. A striking circumstance that should fill our minds with dread and anxiety.

2ndly. Our blindness goes still farther. We desire that this God, made flesh, should save us; but we desire it may be without giving us any trouble. Another contradiction is this, and another motive of fear; for he is our Saviour only conditionally: and the condition is; that we co-operate with him in the work of salvation. St. Augustin observes, that he made us indeed, but will not save us without our own concurrence: he requires that the work of salvation, or rather the fulfilment of this great work, depend upon ourselves, and that we share in the labour without priding ourselves in having done so. As Saviour, he did penance for us; but still requires that we do penance for ourselves. As Saviour, he prayed, wept, and merited for us; but requires that our prayers joined to his—that our tears mingled with his—that our works, sanctified by his, accomplish in us the work of redemption, of which he is the author, and which, without our own co-operation, he would not accomplish. As Saviour, he became a victim for us in the crib, where he began his voluntary immolation; but requires that we be ready to immolate ourselves; and so requires it, and hath made the virtue and efficacy of his sacrifice, relatively to our salvation, so to depend on it, that how disposed soever he be in our favour, although he so loved us as to be made man for us, notwithstanding all his love for us, and all he hath undergone, by being born among us, and like us—he chooses, nevertheless, rather that we perish—that we be damned—that we be eternally excluded from the number of the predestinate, than to save us by that easy and gratuitous redemption, such as we understand it; because under pretence of doing honour to his grace, by attributing our eternal salvation to it, we should turn it to the purpose of leading a loose, disorderly, extravagant life.

It is, therefore, necessary, in order to be saved, that we take pains ourselves, as he took pains for us. This he made a law; a law, which St. Paul so exactly complied with, that he said, "He fulfilled in his flesh the things that were wanting in the sufferings

of Christ;" Col. i; a general and absolute law; a law, with which he hath never dispensed, and with which he will never dispense. From this law, however, you plead exemption. It seems hard and burdensome, and you ardently desire to be freed from its yoke. You wish for salvation; but you would have it be upon your own terms, and without difficulty. You wish for it, provided that neither subjection, nor restraint, nor effort, nor victory over yourself be required of you. You wish for it, but without purchase, or even trouble. What pains are you at, or what are your endeavours to that end? What sacrifice have you made to God? What violence have you offered to yourself? But God, on the other hand, obliges me to declare to you, that while you proceed upon such principles, you have no right, title, or claim, to that salvation for which our Redeemer came into the world. Whence you may judge whether you will find wherewith to comfort and encourage you in the birth of this God-man.

3rdly. In fine, you want he should save you, but you would not have it by the means he hath pointed out. Although these means have been concerted and resolved on in the unerring decrees of his eternal wisdom, they are displeasing to you; although they have been sanctioned in his sacred person, and authorised by his example, you do not relish them. And what are they? Hatred of the world and of yourselves; disengagement from the world and worldly vanities; forsaking the world and its pleasures and preferments; poverty of spirit, humility of heart, mortification of the senses, austerity of life. This language is grating to you. You are for means more proportioned to your worldly notions, and more conformable to your inclinations: and I say, for that reason you ought to tremble; because, independently of your worldly notions and inclinations, it is an undoubted truth, that this incarnate God will save you by no means but those which he himself hath specified; and that those which he himself hath specified will not save you, so long as you follow your inclinations and worldly notions. This is the melancholy mystery I took upon me to proclaim; the more melancholy for you, if, after having heard it, you do not turn it to good purpose.

But by a supposition which I am going to make, I shall place this matter in a clearer light. Perhaps it will surprise you; I would to heaven it may sufficiently surprise you, to force from you an acknowledgment of your secret infidelity, and induce you

to assume sentiments more worthy of a Christian. Tell me then, if Almighty God had sent a Saviour entirely different from him in whom we believe and hope: that is, if a Saviour had come from heaven, favourable to corrupt nature, and diametrically opposite to him whom we adore; if, instead of declaring, like the angel of the Lord, that this Messiah was a poor and humble Saviour, born in a stable, I should assure you now that you had been greatly deceived, he being quite of an opposite character; that his birth was attended with pomp and splendor, with opulence and plenty, with all the conveniencies and pleasures of life; that to these means he hath annexed your eternal welfare, and by these hath undertaken to plant his religion: if, by an inversion, which indeed is impossible, but which we may imagine, the case were thus, and what I call supposition were a reality, tell me what you would have to reform in your conduct, or to correct and amend in your sentiments, in order to conform to this new gospel? Changing belief, would you be obliged to change morals? Would you be under a necessity of quitting your present state for a state of perfection, which this Saviour would point out to you? Or, rather, without any alteration from what you are, would you not, in that supposition, be perfect Christians? And would you not, with reason, felicitate each other on a system of religion, on which your salvation entirely depended, and which tallied so perfectly with your taste and maxims, and with every other rule of life the world prescribes? On such an occasion, might I not say with propriety, "Fear not; for behold I bring you tidings of great joy." A Saviour is born to you; a Saviour to your liking, and after your desires; a Saviour, whose principles will allow you to give full scope to your passions, and who, far from contradicting, will approve and authorise it. Now as he is such a Saviour, be comforted. Should I not, I say, have grounds to address you in this strain? And would you not, filled with a secret joy, say, this is the Saviour and God we wanted? Alas! Christians, I own you would have, in this new system, a right to rejoice; but you are too clear-sighted not to conclude from thence, that what in that case would give you comfort, ought to fill you now with apprehension. For seeing that, in supposition of this new gospel, I might justly say, I bring you happy tidings, my duty obliges me, as I preach a contrary gospel, to hold also a contrary language. At the hazard of disturbing the joy of the church,

which is good and holy, I must disturb yours, which, considering the blindness with which you proceed, is false and presumptuous. I must bid you be afraid, nay, tremble for fear, because a Saviour is born to you; but a Saviour who is seemingly come into the world for your shame and condemnation; who stands in opposition to all your inclinations, an enemy to the world and worldly enjoyments—a poor, humble, suffering Saviour. Afflicting truth! But for whom? For you, worldling; that is, for you, wealthy man, possessed of riches, and intoxicated with your fortune; for you, ambitious man, infatuated with splendor, and an admirer only of earthly pomp; for you, sensual and voluptuous man, whose love is unmeasurable, though confined to yourself, and whose only occupation is the gratifying of your passions and the indulging of your lusts. And thus having discovered this mystery of grief and fear, which is discoverable in the birth of a God-man, let us consider the other mystery, the mystery of comfort, which it includes, and what share we may presume to expect in it: it is the subject of the second part.

Part. II. How trifling soever may be the difference of conditions, in the presence of God, and how often soever we may find in the scriptures, that he glories in being a God equal to all, who hath no regard to rank, and maketh no distinction of persons; yet true it is, Christians, that in the order of grace, his predilection hath uniformly appeared to lean towards the poor and the little, preferably to the great and rich. Without searching into the reason of it, let us be content to adore the decrees of God, who, according to the apostle, doth mercy to whom he pleaseth, and justice to whom he pleaseth. This predilection is manifest and authentic throughout the whole gospel; but no where more so, than in that august mystery, which is the adorable subject of the present celebration. For to whom did God choose to reveal first the nativity of his divine Son? To the shepherds; that is, to poor men, intent on their work, unknown to the world, and content with their obscurity and the innocence of their state. These are they, (as St. Ambrose remarks,) whom Christ first appoints to be of the number of his elect; to whom he first communicates the knowledge of his divinity; and from whom he receives the first act of adoration. They are the first attendants on this God-made man, and surround his cradle, while the great in Judea, the rich in Jerusalem, the learned in the synagogue, abandoned, as I may say,

and delivered over to themselves, are bewildered in the mazes and dark intricacies of unbelief, and to all appearance bear no part in the birth of the Saviour.

Yes, my brethren, (says St. Paul to the Corinthians,) these are the best and first fruits of your vocation. The weak are pitched upon to confound the power of the great; the simple, to confound the arguments of the wise; the mean and despicable, according to the notion of the world, to confound that which is most illustrious and most eminent in the world. Such was the commencement of the Christian religion; such was the original of God's church, which was shut up (as St. Chrysostom observes) within the narrow limits of a stable, seeing that Jesus Christ was there only known. And this, ye great ones of the world who hear me, if God's amiable providence had not provided for your wants, had been sufficient to plunge you into the deepest affliction, or even drive you to despair. Be of good heart, and convinced, as you shall be presently, of the immensity of his mercies; notwithstanding the circumstances in which, by your condition, you are unfortunately engaged, put your trust in him. For I shall adduce three principal motives of consolation drawn from the mystery we are now solemnizing. Give me all your attention; and after resolving with fear and trembling this ineffable mystery in your minds, proceed to enjoy all the comfort it affords: "for behold I bring you tidings of great joy." How exposed soever you may be to the vices and corruptions of the world, and how remote soever you may seem to be from the kingdom of God, Jesus Christ rejects you not; Jesus Christ, who came into the world only with a view to draw you to himself—an inestimable grace, with which it is incumbent on you to correspond. How contrary soever to that of the blessed Jesus your condition in life may appear to be, it is still in your power, remaining what you are, to resemble him in holiness; an important point, which concerns your predestination, and of which it is meet you should be fully apprized. How dangerous soever human grandeur may be, and whatever malediction hath been pronounced against riches, they may serve you as the means of honouring Jesus Christ, and rendering him the particular worship he expects; an immense advantage, which it is your bounden duty to seize on, and to make, as it were, the foundation of your hopes.

1st. Although Jesus Christ, beloved hearers, by a special choice,

would be born in lowliness and humiliation, he cannot be said to have, therefore, proscribed the great, or the greatness of the world; nor am I afraid of offending your delicacy by saying, that from his very birth, far from despising them, he sought after them, and brought them to a knowledge of himself, and graciously indulged them with a peculiar connexion. This incontestably appears from the gospel you have heard; for when this saving God calls shepherds and the poor to surround his cradle, he calls also the wise men, powerful and opulent, nay, dignified with royalty, if we may believe tradition. When an angel from heaven is deputed to those, a resplendent star is made a guide to these; when those quit their flocks to adore and acknowledge him, these quit their country, possessions and rank: but whether these or those paid him greater honour, or were dearer to him, is a problem I shall not take upon me to solve; but, waving the comparison, it is true that both were received in the stable by this God-man; at least it is true, that under the veil of human infancy, he makes his divinity known to both, and that he excludes not the great by preferring the little to them.

Now, ye men of the world, ought not this alone to stir up your confidence? Is it not sufficient to strengthen your resolution, and inflame your souls with a generous ardour? But more consolation flows in upon you from the same source, forasmuch as Christ Jesus, in the mystery of his nativity, independently of his predilection, hath done more, in reality, for the great than the little; because a stronger grace was necessary to attract such as the wise men, than shepherds, whose ignorance and imbecility seemed a natural disposition to the humility of the faith. In the latter, all was pliant to the divine insinuation; but in the former, grace had numberless obstacles to encounter and surmount; namely, the world and its lusts. This was the miracle which it wrought; this, the memorable victory which the faith of our Redeemer, Christ, gained over the world: "This is the victory that overcometh the world; our faith:" John i. v.: a victorious and triumphant faith, which wanted not sufficient influence over the minds of men, notwithstanding the licentiousness of the world, made an impression on their hearts, sufficient to eradicate the strongest passions, and bring them captive under the yoke of the Christian religion.

And now, whoever you are, or whatever your rank in life may be, do you complain that your God condemns your condition, or

that your condition is a bar between you and your God? No! Christians; it neither debars you from your God, nor doth your God condemn it. It doth not debar you from your God, as he manifestly supplies it with abundant grace: your God condemns it not, as on his coming into the world, he sanctified it in the wise men, and reformed it in you. He condemns the abuse and irregularity of your condition; he condemns the pageantry, the luxury, the effeminacy, the hardheartedness, the impiety of your condition, not the condition itself; as it is for that, and for you, he displays, this day, the treasure of his most particular and efficacious graces. As the God of all ranks, who came for the salvation of all mankind, he requires from his cradle, in which he already performs the functions of a Saviour, that great and small, rich and poor, masters and menial train, appear in his retinue.

2ndly. But after all, what analogy can his poverty bear to opulence, his debasement to grandeur, his distress to the ease and conveniencies of life? To this I answer, by a second proposition, which I have already advanced, and which I now resume. I say, it is in your power, remaining what you are, to resemble in holiness the infant Jesus; and notwithstanding the contrariety which is so very visible between your state and his, to possess that perfect conformity to him, in which is founded (according to the doctrine of St. Paul) man's predestination. To be owned by God, and partake of his glory, we must have the characteristic of, and bear a resemblance to, this new-born infant; and it is relatively to him, and to him only that it may be said with propriety: "Unless ye become as this little child, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." Matt. xviii. At the very thoughts of so hard a task, you are disturbed in mind, your spirits sink, and you are filled with dismay. But hear the sequel. I hold it is not hard, much less impossible, for you to attain, without change of condition, this divine similitude. You may, as Christians, be great and humble of heart, rich and poor in spirit, powerful and of a meek and unruffled temper. Now the moment you join humility to greatness, meekness to power, and disaffection to the possession and enjoyment of riches, your state no longer clashes with that of your Redeemer. On the contrary, you have by these means the advantage of being more conformable to that model of the predestinate, and exhibit in the world more finished copies. For, the character of this Saviour is not merely to be poor and humble, but to be great and humble at the

same time; or rather, to be humble and to be greatness itself, as, notwithstanding his humility, he is the Son of the Most High. Now, beloved brethren, it is *your* peculiar happiness, that you are enabled, in the rank which God hath placed you, to imitate all these in a degree of perfection, to which those, whom obscurity of birth, or slenderness of fortune, having mixed with the crowd, are deficient in the power and ability of aspiring. To whatever degree of sanctity they may have risen, their humility is unexpressive, and an ill emblem of a God reduced to a state of depression: dignity and distinction, in the opinion of the world, are necessary for that. A great man, who without derogating from his quality, practices the humility prescribed by his religion; a great man, who is little in his own eyes, and perpetually mindful that he is a sinner, and mortal, and walks before his God with respect and fear; a great man, who can say like David, "Lord, my heart is not puffed up, nor are my eyes haughty;" Psalm cxxx.; I have not been dazzled with the vain splendor and worldly pomp that surround me, nor have I been hurried into undertakings either beneath me, or contrary to justice and charity; "neither have I walked in the great matters, nor in wonderful things above me." Psalm cxxx. A great man, actuated by these sentiments, is a perfect imitator of the great God, whose adorable debasement we this day commemorate. A great man, in this disposition, is a true Christian; a Christian that humbles himself like the divine infant, who is presented to us in the stable at Bethlehem: a great man *like this little child;* and it is to him—to this great man, I am bold enough to apply the words that follow: "he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." A great man upon earth, sanctified in this manner, is, I do not say, great, but very great in the kingdom of heaven.

Thus, the Saviour of the world brings the great and the rich, the poor and the vulgar, to his cradle. And who are they, or who ought they to be? Let us judge by the wise men, whose example is applicable to the present circumstances, and who are nearly connected with the present mystery. Ah! Christians, they are truly great—yet seem only to be so, to display in their conduct, by following the star of the God that calls them, a more profound humility—a more prompt obedience—a more entire submission to the orders of heaven: and these are they to whom God reveals himself, as well as to the little; because the likeness they bear to him, is in some shape greater than that of the little. These are the rich,

who, far from setting their hearts on their riches, in all humility lay them at the feet of the spotless Lamb, and make a merit of their abdication; the rich, whom Almighty God disdains not, because he finds that not unfrequently, in the midst of their riches, they are poorer of heart than the poor themselves. And is not this a powerful inducement for you to put up a thousand acts of thanksgiving to heaven, who, in the highest pitch of elevation and fortune, are enabled to partake of the same advantages? And if you rightly comprehend the spirit of your religion, have you not a thousand reasons to praise God eternally, who gives you an opportunity of acquiring holiness with so little difficulty, and by the very means which seem in their nature to stand in direct opposition to holiness?

3rdly. How dangerous soever may be the grandeur of the world, how cursed soever may be its riches, I advance a third proposition, equally incontestable; namely, that it depends on yourselves to make them subservient toward paying the infant Jesus the particular worship he expects from you; and thus I conceive it to be: as God, and humble, he demands honour and glory; as God, and poor, he demands assistance and relief. This double tribute he requires at your hands: and it is justly accounted the greatest blessing of your exalted station, that you have it in your power to consecrate to your Saviour what would otherwise be the cause of your condemnation. What treasures of grace, would you but store them up. But this I shall now set forth in a clearer point of light.

As God, and humble, he demands honour and glory; and, accordingly, he seeks adorers from among the Gentiles. But what adorers? Men distinguished by their dignity, who, prostrate and lowly in his presence, to a great degree, do him more honour, and procure him more glory, than the shepherds of Judea with all their zeal. Nothing, in fact, can do him greater honour, and procure him more glory, than the homage of the great. Now, on whom but yourselves doth it depend, to give him that glory of which he declares himself so jealous? Why were you invested with authority in the world? Why did God place you in your present elevation? What is it not in your power to do for him? And, if compared with you, what doth the rest of mankind do? To you it is owing that the doctrine and religion of this God-man are held in veneration. It is by your means that his worship is

readily, solidly, and universally established; and it is authorised by your example. To what better purpose, to what equally good, can you exert your power? And what doth it cost you but the will to do it? By this rule you ought to estimate your places at court, and public employment. With this only view it is allowable to entertain a passion for them, or to indulge complacency in the thoughts of possessing them. In every other respect, they ought to create sorrow. But your comfort should be, that you have by means of them, a fair opportunity of glorifying the majesty, and carrying farther than others the interests of a God reduced to so great a degree of debasement.

To draw to a conclusion. As God, and poor, he demands relief, no longer for himself, but for his members, which are the poor. On this occasion, I should not acquit myself thoroughly of my ministry, did I forget the poor—the members of Jesus Christ. If you be Christians at all, you must be fired with emulation of those blessed wise men, who came a long journey from the extremity of the east, and appeared before the Saviour, not with empty hands, but offered him presents, of which he accepted. And I say, that he insists upon receiving from your hands a similar oblation; I say, that without seeking him so far, you may find him in the midst of you, because he is so in reality; and because he is in places, and in stations of life, in which he suffers as much, and is as much forsaken, as in the stable at Bethlehem: I say, that the poor, who surround you, and whom you see, and still more those whom you do not see, and who cannot approach you, are in your regard the same Jesus Christ, to whom the shepherds presented the produce of the fields, and the wise men made an offering of gold and frankincense: I say, that we learn from the doctrine of faith, that what is given to the poor, is given to Jesus Christ, and with more merit when put into their hands, than if put into his without any intervention. Hence, and what a fund of confidence! hence your riches, according to the ordinary course of things, an obstacle to salvation, are perfectly innocent, and become salutary; hence they lose the characteristic of reprobation which the scripture gives them; hence they coincide with, and are a supplement and support to, the poverty of Jesus Christ, as he enters into a holy association with you, partaking of your property, and imparting to you his merits; hence, made holy by this participation, they change their nature, and from treasures of iniquity

become the occasion of that most excellent virtue, charity; hence those curses which the Son of God thunders out in the gospel against riches, will not light upon you. Jesus Christ (says St. Chrysostom) is too just and faithful to execrate riches which he himself demands. "Blessed is he," cries the royal Psalmist, "who understandeth concerning the needy and the poor." Ps. xl. And I say the same thing, and with greater reason, as the poor are for a Christian, in a special manner, a mystery of faith. But, resuming my principle, I add, blessed is he who understandeth concerning the poverty and humility of a God-made man.

Because he humbled himself, (says St. Paul,) God, for his exaltation, enjoins the whole world to bend the knee to his Name; and it is in the courts of princes that this prediction is authentically verified, as the powers of the world, which we revere in them, are endowed by heaven with particular grace, to honour and adore this Word made flesh, who condescended to appear in an abject state on our account. Thus (says St. Chrysostom) is this divine Saviour requited for the humiliations he underwent at his birth, persecuted by Herod, and obedient to Augustus. But thanks be to heaven, the world, at present, wears another aspect; and we see mighty monarchs obedient to Jesus Christ, using all their endeavours to promote his reign, which I call, not the progress, but the completion and glory, of our holy religion.

SERMON II.

ON THE PASSION OF OUR SAVIOUR.

"*The Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a scandal, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God.*" 1 Cor. i.

If ever the preachers could with any show of reason blush at their ministration, is it not to-day, when they see themselves necessitated to publish the astonishing humiliations of the God they announce; the outrages he received; the weakness he felt; his langour; his sufferings; his passion; his death? And yet, says the great

apostle, notwithstanding the ignominies of the cross, I shall never blush at the gospel of my Saviour; and the reason he assigns for it is as surprising as, nay more surprising than, the notion he conceived of it. I know (he adds) that the gospel of the cross is the power of God, for all those who are enlightened with the light of the faith. "I am not ashamed of the gospel; for, it is the power of God to every one that believeth." Rom. i. St. Paul, far from being ashamed of it, placed his glory in it. "God forbid," says he, writing to the Galatians, "that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." Gal. vi. Far from being ashamed of the cross, in the exercise of his ministry, he positively asserted, that, to support with honour, the most ready and infallible means was, to preach the cross of God made man; and that, in reality, there was nothing in all the gospel more noble, more wonderful, or even more proper to satisfy a man of good sense, than this profound and adorable mystery: for this is the literal sense of the passage I have chosen for my text: "The Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom." 1 Cor. i. The incredulity of the Jews requires that we make them see a miracle; the pride and vanity of the Greeks make them plume themselves upon their wisdom; both the one and the other have taken an obstinate resolution not to believe in Jesus Christ, but on one of these two conditions. But, for my part, (says the apostle,) in order equally to confound the incredulity of those, and the vanity of these, I am determined to preach Jesus Christ even crucified; and the reason of it is, that it is eminently a miracle of God's power, and a master-piece, at the same time, of God's wisdom; a miracle of God's power, which alone should strike the Jews beyond every other miracle: "Christ crucified, the power of God;" a master-piece of God's wisdom, which alone is more than sufficient to make the Gentiles submit to the faith, and bid farewell to all worldly wisdom: "Christ crucified, the wisdom of God."

An admirable idea this of St. Paul's, representing perpetually to himself the passion of our Saviour Jesus Christ, as a mystery of power and wisdom. Now it is to this idea, beloved Christians, I mean to adhere, because it seemed to me, on one hand, more fit to give you edification; and, on the other, more worthy of Jesus Christ, whose funeral sermon I have undertaken this day to preach. For our business now is, not to bewail the death of that God-man; our tears, if any we have to shed, must be reserved for another pur-

pose; neither can we be ignorant of what that purpose is, since Jesus Christ himself hath told it so positively and so distinctly, when going to Calvary he said to the daughters of Jerusalem: "weep not for me, but for yourselves." I say, our business now is, not to bewail his death, but to meditate upon it; to dive into the mystery of it, to see the work of God: our business is to discover in it wherewithal to fix and strengthen our faith; and this is what, with the holy grace of my God, I undertake to do. A hundred times your hearts have yearned and melted at the melancholy story of the passion of Jesus Christ; but I mean to convey instruction The moving and pathetic discourses you have heard, have often filled your souls with grief, but perhaps a fruitless grief, or at most a transitory grief, without effecting a change of manners. My design is, to convince your reason, and dwell on something more solid, which may be, in future, a ground for all the pious sentiments which this mystery shall inspire. This, therefore, beloved hearers, is the division of the following discourse:

1st. You have not as yet, perhaps, considered the death of our blessed Saviour, but as the mystery of his humility and weakness; but I shall make it appear that he hath, in this mystery, displayed peculiarly his omnipotent power.

2ndly. The world hath hitherto considered this mystery as a folly; but I shall make it appear that God in this mystery, hath most particularly set forth his wisdom.

Give me, O Lord! to handle worthily so great a subject, the zeal with which your apostle was filled, when you had chosen him to carry your name before nations and kings, and to make them revere, in the very humiliation of your cross, the divinity of your person. I speak not, as St. Paul did, to Jews or Gentiles; I speak to Christians by profession; but among whom some are, every day, perceived unsteadfast in the faith, who, full of worldly maxims and notions, and relying too confidently on human prudence, are, although Christians, sometimes disturbed, and even tempted, when the God whom they adore is represented to them as loaded with ignominy, and dying on a cross. Now upon this account it is, that I would strengthen them, by making them know the gift of God, hidden in the mystery of your death; and by impressing on their minds a right idea of your seeming weaknesses. Bear me up, therefore, O my God! but give to my hearers, at the same time, the docility with which it is incumbent

on them to hear your word, to the intent that they may not only be persuaded, but converted and sanctified.

PART I. That a God, as God, should act as Master, and supreme Lord; that out of nothing he should, with a word, make heaven and earth; that he should work prodigies throughout the whole universe, and that nothing should resist his power, is a thing, Christians, so natural to him, that for us it is hardly a subject of admiration: but that a God should suffer; should expire in torments; should, as the scripture speaks, taste death—he who alone possesses immortality—is a thing that neither angels nor men will be ever able to comprehend. Well may I, therefore, cry out with the prophet: "Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this!" Jer. ii. For, this is that which surpasses all our understanding, and which requires all the submission and all the obedience of our faith; but it is also in this great mystery that our faith hath overcome the world: "This is the victory that overcometh the world; our faith." 1 John v. True it is, beloved Christians, Jesus Christ hath suffered, and died. But in speaking of his death and sufferings, I make no difficulty of advancing a proposition, which you would look upon as a paradox, if the words of my text did not dispose you to hearken to it with respect. I maintain that Christ our Lord died and suffered as a God; that is, in a manner suitable only to a God; in a manner so peculiar to God himself, that the great apostle, for no other reason, did not hesitate to declare to Jews and Gentiles: This crucified Christ, my brethren, whom we preach to you, whose death scandalizes you, who, on Calvary, seemed to you struck by the hand of God, and reduced to the utmost weakness, is the power of God himself. That which you despise in him, is what raises in us a veneration for him. He is our God; and that he is so, we want no sign or proof but his cross. This, in short, is the substance of St. Paul's theology. Let us enter, dear Christians, into the spirit of these divine words: "Christ crucified, the power of God;" and let us draw from them the fruit they ought to produce in our souls.

I say, that Jesus Christ died in a manner suitable only to a God-man. To convince you of it, more is required than a plain exposition of facts. In effect, a man who dies, after having foretold, himself, in terms the most express and clear, all the circumstances of his death; a man who dies performing miracles, nay the greatest miracles, to show there is nothing but what is preternatural and

divine in his death; a man whose death, if we consider it thoroughly, is itself the greatest of all miracles; inasmuch as, far from dying like other men, through loss of spirit, he dies, on the contrary, through an effort of his omnipotence. But, what surpasses all the rest; a man, who, by the infamy of his death, arrives to the highest pitch of glory; and who, expiring on the cross, overcomes by the cross, the prince of the world; tramples by the cross upon the pride of the world; erects his cross upon the ruins of the idolatry and infidelity of the world. Is not this to die like a God; or, if you like that better, like a God-man? And on this ground it was that the apostle went, when he said, that this man, dead on the cross, was not the minister of God's power, but the power of God made flesh: "Christ crucified, the power of God." Let us not separate these four proofs; and you will allow, that there is no reasonable, or even obstinate mind, that ought not to be effected with them. Now to come to particulars. 1st. None but a God can dive in such a manner into futurity, as to have it absolutely in his power, and be able to say absolutely and authoritatively, this or that shall come to pass, although the matter in question depend upon an infinity of free causes that must necessarily concur in it. None but a God can know distinctly, and of himself, the bottom of hearts, and search into the most hidden secrets and close intentions, in such a manner as to know infinitely better and clearer, what is in the thoughts and will of man, than man himself. Now this is what Jesus Christ did with respect to his passion and death. Indeed to hear him speak of his passion, long before the exhibition of that tragic scene, or his enemies had formed plots against his life, one would imagine that he relates the circumstances of a present event; so minutely he points out and makes known every particular. And to see him on the day of that sad catastrophe, undergo the various torments prepared for him, one would imagine that his tormentors were not so much the executioners of the sentence pronounced against him, as of his own prediction. In short, (says he to his apostles, in order to prepare them for this doleful mystery,) we are now going to Jerusalem, and whatever hath been foretold of the Son of man, will be accomplished. This Son of man, (for so he was pleased to express himself,) whom you behold, and now speaks to you, will be delivered to the Gentiles: he will be outraged, insulted, scourged, buffeted, crucified; they will spit in his face;

he will die ignominiously, and will rise again the third day. Mind, Christians, the reflection which St. Chrysostom makes in this place; for many ages past, there had been prophets in the old law, forerunners of the Messiah, who had published all these particulars. As the chief obstacle which was one day to alienate worldly minds from believing in Jesus Christ, was the supposed scandal which the ignominy of his death would cause, God in his singularly providential wisdom had revealed to his prophets, that the death thought ignominious of the Messiah, would, in the fulness of time, be a sovereign remedy for sin; a solemn reparation of sin; a means to bring about the salvation and redemption of the world: in fine, that the prophecies, those irrefragable testimonies of his divinity, rendered the very ignominies of his death, not only venerable, but adorable; and that men, in this view, far from being scandalized at it, would be persuaded that there was in the passion of our Saviour nothing but what was above man's power and comprehension. For (says St. Chrysostom) this was God's design, when, in the Old Testament, he made Isaiah speak of the sufferings of Jesus Christ with as much certainty, and in terms as precise, as the holy evangelists have done in the New. But this design of God was still more plain and obvious, and the proof of it much more convincing and affecting, in the immediate prediction of Jesus Christ himself: for he tells his disciples, discoursing with them about his approaching death; I am the man of sorrows, mentioned by Isaiah, and am now about to fulfil, to a tittle, whatever hath been written upon that subject. The time is come for the consummation of these things, and you yourselves shall presently bear witness to it; but it behoves me to forewarn you of it in this manner, that you may not be disturbed at it.

Accordingly, whatever this adorable Saviour had pointed out to them in the books of Moses and the prophets, as relating to himself, was fulfilled, shortly afterwards, to the letter, in the bloody catastrophe of his death and passion. It was in consequence, and in virtue of these divine prophecies, of which he was personally himself the subject, that the Jews, instead of bringing him, which according to law they should have done, to judgment, as he was a Jew, delivered him over to be judged by Pilate, who was a Gentile; that the soldiers, contrary to all the forms of judicature, over and above the sentence of condemnation passed on him, added insult and inhumanity; spat in his face, and bruised him with buffets;

that in every the minutest circumstance, the price at which he he was to be sold—the use to which that money was to be applied—the casting lots for his garment, and the gall which was presented him, the scriptures which he applied to himself were, it should seem, the rule of all the things his enemies had plotted against him; as if he had suffered only to justify the oracles delivered so many ages before his appearing in the world: "That the scriptures might be fulfilled." Matt. xxvi. "That the word which he had said might be fulfilled." John xiii. This argument was so solid, that there needed no more to convert the famous eunuch, treasurer to the queen of Ethiopia, of whom mention is made in the Acts; and to whom Philip, the deacon, explained the wondrous things I preach. These prophecies, and many others, literally and punctually verified in the passion of our Saviour, obliged him to acknowledge the Messiah promised, and sent by God in the fulness of time. Shall we, beloved brethren, who are vested with the glorious character of Christians, be less feelingly affected than he was? And shall that which was sufficient to convince a man not yet enlightened with the gospel rays, be destitute of power sufficient to confirm us in the faith which we profess?

The same I say of secrets hidden in the recesses of the heart, of which Christ Jesus showed very evidently in his passion that he was master. He foretold to his apostles, that one among them would betray him; and Judas actually had it in his thoughts to betray him; and did betray him: he foretold to St. Peter, that he would deny him; and St. Peter did in reality deny him: he foretold to him, that notwithstanding his lapse, his faith would not fail him; and, notwithstanding his lapse, his faith did not fail him. He foretold to him, that, after his conversion, he would be the encouragement of his brethren; and, in fact, his conversion inspired them all with courage: he foretold to Magdalen, that the action which she then performed, by pouring a precious ointment on his head, would be praised and preached throughout the world; and it is to this day spoken of, to her commendation throughout the world: he foretold to Jerusalem, with streaming eyes, that it would be destroyed and ruined to all intents and purposes; and Jerusalem was besieged, sacked, and laid in ashes, by the Romans, so that there did not remain one stone upon another. Was not this knowledge of things hidden in the dark recesses of futurity,

and of the most impenetrable secrets, evidently the knowledge of a God that "searcheth the hearts and the loins?" Psalm vii. And had not the man who died in this manner, revealing and manifesting that which neither was nor could be known, saving only to God himself, all the power of God himself?

2ndly. But what I have to add should make a still greater impression on you. This God-man dies working miracles; and what miracles? Ah! Christians, have there ever been, or will there ever be such illustrious miracles? At the point of death as he is, he makes the earth tremble; opens the sepulchres; resuscitates the dead; rends in two the veil of the temple, and hides in more than Egyptian darkness the great luminary of the world; prodigies equally astonishing and unheard of; prodigies, with which the soldiers were so deeply affected, that it occasioned their conversion; but a conversion (as St. Augustin remarks) arising from the efficacy and virtue of the very blood they had spilt. And, indeed, whatever I have said, St. Matthew reports in express terms: "When they saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly; saying, Truly this was the Son of God." Matt. xxvii. I am aware that there have been, even among the Christians, impious men, and greater enemies to Jesus Christ and his cross, than either Jews or Gentiles, who have not been ashamed to question the truth of these miracles, pretending that they might have been fictitious, and that the holy evangelists might have formed a scheme among themselves to publish them in the world, with a view to exalt their Master's glory. But here, to use a scripture phrase, impiety is its own confusion; and, rising in in opposition to the Deity, displays its ignorance and malignity. For, not to examine the rashness and folly of this impiety, whereas it hath no other foundation than the prepossession and spirit of libertinism; it ought to be shown (says St. Augustin) what inducement the holy evangelists could have to publish to the world these miracles of Jesus Christ, were they persuaded they were false miracles. Is it not clear, that all the fruit they could have expected from a publication of that nature, was public hatred, persecutions, fetters, dungeons, and cruel torments? Far, therefore, from believing they could have delighted in inventing and spreading abroad such miracles, we ought rather to be astonished, that though they knew them to be true, they had the courage and resolution, at the expense of their lives, to bear witness to them.

Further, (continues the same St. Augustin,) the style alone in which the evangelists have written the history of Jesus Christ, and of his passion—their simplicity, frankness, and sincerity, show very evidently, they did not write influenced by passion and prepossession; but as irreproachable and faithful witnesses to the truth, of which they were themselves the martyrs—even to the effusion of their blood. They discover no traces either of indignation against the Jews, or of compassion for their Master; they speak of him as men the most indifferent, and most disinterested in the world would have spoken. They recount his weaknesses in the garden; his apathy; his frights; his wasted spirits; the galling affront he had to undergo in Herod's palace; the contemptuous usage of that prince towards him; the shameful and unjust treatment he met with in the houses of Annas, Caiaphas, and Pilate; and these they relate more punctiliously and more diffusely than even his miracles.

This is not all; for if these miracles had been fictitious, would not the Jews, whom it so much imported to discover the imposture, and who were not destitute at that time of able penmen, have taken care to undeceive the world? Would they not have protested against it? This, however, they never did; this they do not at this day, as their best authors, particularly Josephus, would make good the reverse against them. That universal eclipse which happened, contrary to the course of nature, had in it something so prodigious and so remarkable, that Tertullian, two centuries after, speaks of it to the pagan magistrates of Rome, as of a singular fact—of which they kept the tradition in their archives. This fact, which was unquestionable and avowed, surprised that heathen philosopher, Denis the Areopagite, (but who afterwards became one of the strongest pillars and greatest ornaments of our religion,) in such a manner, that, remote as he was from Judea, and still more so from any knowledge of our mysteries, he of himself found out that this eccentric darkness was an origin of light for him. Accordingly, it disposed him to receive submissively the truths of faith, and the instructions of St. Paul. What shall I say of the famous criminal crucified with our blessed Saviour, and instantly converted by the same Saviour? Could this change of a wicked wretch, who all on a sudden, became a vessel of election and mercy, be attributed to human persuasion? Doth it not on the contrary, appear to have arisen from a supernatural and

divine principle? If Jesus Christ had not acted as God, how could he, dying upon the cross, have made his divinity known to this miscreant, and have made him openly confess it? And doth not this miracle of grace corroborate all the prodigies of nature, by which heaven and earth, as it were in concert, honoured this agonizing and expiring God?

But, you will tell me that the Pharisees, notwithstanding these miracles, persisted in their incredulity. Granted, Christians; but without attempting to fathom, in what regards this matter, the deep abysses of God's judgments—judgments equally venerable and dreadful, you know how great a spite the Pharisees bore our Saviour; you know how great the power of such a passion is, in binding minds and hardening hearts. However inconceivable the obstinacy of the Pharisees might have been, we might perhaps find at this day, in the world, nay, the Christian world, men as incredulous, were they but to see those who differ from them work miracles; men, who would sooner attribute these miracles to hell, as the Pharisees attributed those of our blessed Saviour to the prince of darkness, than give up their prejudices and their hatred. Be that as it may, (says St. Chrysostom,) from thence it is, that the reprobation of the Pharisees took its rise; and this mysterious work of divine predestination and reprobation appeared in this—that the same miracles which converted the soldiers, and a numberless multitude of other people, served to confirm the Pharisees in their inflexibility and indocility. But it is by this difference that we may discover in Jesus Christ expiring, the all-powerful virtue in question. For (as St. Chrysostom says, arguing on this topic) now, at his dying, he distributes mercy and justice, saving some and reprobating others; dispensing rays of light to the blind, who lived in the darkness of infidelity, and blinding the most enlightened, who abused their lights; converting those to grace, through mercy, and suffering these to perish, through justice: thus, to display in his very death, those glorious and essential attributes of his divinity!

There was but one miracle which our Saviour declined working in his passion, and that was, to save himself, as his enemies proposed to him, assuring him that if he would come down from the cross, they would believe in him. But why did he not work this miracle? The reason is easily seen (says St. Augustin): this one miracle would have destroyed all the rest, and stopped the course of the great work he had undertaken; a work to which all

the others referred, as to their end; namely, the redemption of mankind; a work which was to be consummated on the cross. Moreover, his enemies, blinded by passion, would have paid no more regard to this miracle, than they had done to raising Lazarus from the dead. For if the evidence of the fact, which obliged them to grant that Lazarus, who had been dead in his grave four days, was incontestably resuscitated, instead of inducing them to believe in Jesus Christ, induced them to take a resolution to destroy him, because it was not reason, but passion, that presided at their councils: can we suppose, that, though they had seen him disengage himself from the cross, they had been more sincere, and better disposed to give him the glory due to him?

But to insist no longer on what regards the Pharisees, tell me, Christians, did Jesus Christ, in the conjuncture in which I consider him, as he had it beyond all doubt in his power to save himself, but did not choose it, do something greater and more exceeding the power of man, than if he had chosen to save himself? If we compare miracles—(lend all your attention to this, which you have not perhaps as yet sufficiently considered, and which to me seems extremely edifying,)—if we compare miracles, that meekness with which he permits the soldiers to seize his person, after casting them upon the ground, by only presenting himself before them, and saying these words: "I am he;" that gentle rebuke he gave St. Peter for the indiscretion of his zeal, whereas he drew his sword against one of the high-priest's servants, letting him know that he need but pray to his Father, and that his Father would send him whole legions of angels, to discomfit his foes, and defend him; and, to convince him that he did not speak in vain, actually curing, in a miraculous manner, the servant whom Peter just before had wounded; that so admirable a silence, and so constantly supported before his judges, particularly Pilate, who, knowing his innocence, questioned him only to have an opportunity of acquitting him; that refusal to satisfy the prince's curiosity, whose protection he might so easily have procured; that giving up his own cause, and consequently his life; that tranquillity and peaceful deportment in the midst of a thousand insults; that resolution to bear every thing, without demanding satisfaction, without impeaching any person, without uttering the least complaint; that heroic charity, which made him, as he expired on the cross, plead the excuse of his persecutors: was not, I say, all this, in a man, whose conduct in all

other respects was irreproachable and full of wisdom, more miraculous, than if he had chosen to escape the hand of his executioners, and had disengaged himself from the cross? "Christ crucified, the power of God."

3rdly. He died, therefore, because it was his will to die; and died in the manner he chose to die: circumstances, according to St. Augustin, peculiar to a God-man, and which demonstrate, even in death, the sovereign independence of God. Now it is hereon, Christians, I found this other proposition; that the death of Jesus Christ, thoroughly considered in itself, was not only a miracle, but a miracle the most singular of all miracles. The reason of it is, that other men die through weakness, through violence, through necessity; but he died, I do not say by choice, and a free disposition of his will, but by the means of his absolute power. So that he never, as Son of God, and as God, made a greater effort of his absolute power, than at the moment he consented that his blessed soul should be separated from his body; and for this, two reasons are assigned by the schoolmen. First, say they, because Jesus Christ being without sin, and absolutely impeccable, he could not but be naturally immortal. Whence it follows, that as his body and soul were united hypostatically with the divinity, they could not be separated without a miracle. It was necessary, therefore, that Jesus Christ, to bring about this separation, should break, as I may say, through all the laws of ordinary providence, and use the whole power he had received from God, to destroy this life, which, though human, was nevertheless the life of a God. Secondly, because Jesus Christ being eminently, in virtue of his priesthood, the sovereign Pontiff of the new law, none but he could, or ought to offer to God the sacrifice of the redemption of the world, or immolate the Victim ordained for it. Now his body was this victim. None but himself, ought, therefore, to immolate this body; none but himself had the power necessary for that end. His executioners, it is true, were the ministers of God's justice; but they were not the priests, whose duty it was to offer this sacrifice to the Deity. For that purpose, there must be a pontiff, holy, innocent, and immaculate, separated from the whole host of sinners, and invested with a special character. Now this character was suitable only to Jesus Christ. Whence St. Augustin concludes, that Jesus Christ was most wonderfully, at the same time, the Priest offering, and the Victim offered.

It was, therefore, he himself that sacrificed himself; he himself

that exercised on himself this function of priest and pontiff; he himself that destroyed, at least for a few days, that adorable compound of a suffering body and a glorious soul; in a word, it was he himself that brought about his own death. His life was not taken from him by the bloody hand of execution: he laid it down of his own accord. "No man taketh my life from me; but I lay it down of myself." John x.

He died (says St. Augustin) upon the cross; but, properly speaking, and in rigour, he did not die by the punishment of the cross. And to make this point appear, it is certain, from the Jews' own testimony, that the punishment of the cross, or rather that which made condemned criminals die upon the cross, was not merely the being nailed to it, but the being broken alive on it. Now Jesus Christ, according to the prophecy, had breathed his last, when they set about to break his limbs; and accordingly, "Pilate marvelled if he were already dead." Mark xv. And what puts it beyond all doubt that he died not by the failing of nature, is, that "he gave up the ghost, crying out with a loud voice:" a thing so extraordinary, as the evangelist reports: "When the centurion, who stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly, this man was the Son of God." Mark xv. Had the centurion, who thus reasoned, been a disciple of our Saviour, perhaps his reasoning and testimony might have been suspected. But he is an infidel, who justly concludes, without hesitation, from what he observes, that the manner in which Jesus Christ dies is wholly miraculous; and from this miracle, seeing that he so gave up the ghost, he draws the consequence, "Truly, this man was the Son of God." What need there more to make good the great apostle's words, "Christ crucified, the power of God?"

True, it is, our blessed Redeemer was not exempt from weakness and sorrow at his death. To this I might answer, with the prophet, that the sorrows and weaknesses which he discovered were not his own, but ours; and the wonder is, "that he truly bore our weaknesses, and carried our sorrows." Isaiah xv. But as this thought, however solid, seems too refined for worldly and unbelieving minds, I answer otherwise with St. Chrysostom, and I say, yes; our Saviour had his weaknesses; and the wonder is, that these weaknesses were so many distinct miracles, in the course of his sacred passion. For if he sweats during his prayer in the garden, it is blood he sweats; and so copiously, that the ground is bedewed

with it. If, a few moments after he expires, his side is laid open with a lance, blood and water issue forth from it, and he who relates the fact, assures us, that he himself saw it, and that his testimony deserves credit; one would imagine, that he dies and suffers only to display the power of God in his person: "Christ crucified, the power of God."

4thly. Proceed we now to the last, but most essential proof: it is to see a man, whom the ignominy, the confusion, and infinite humiliation of his death, raised to all the glory which a God can assume: insomuch, that at the mentioning of his name, and sight of his cross, the most mighty powers of the world bend the knee, and fall prostrate, to pay him homage for their greatness: "He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death; even the death of the cross. Upon which account, God hath so exalted him, that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow; of those in heaven, and those on earth, and those under the earth." Phil. ii. This is what God revealed to St. Paul, at a time when all things seemed to combine in opposition to the fulfilling of this prediction; at a time when, after the views of human prudence, this prediction must have been looked upon as chimerical; at a time when the name of Jesus was held in abhorrence. Nevertheless, the apostle's prediction is fulfilled. What was an article of faith for the Christians of those times, is it not, in some measure, so for us, in that we are witnesses of the thing, and are not under the necessity of captivating our understandings to believe it? The powers of the earth now bend the knee before Christ crucified. Our sovereigns, nay, our greatest sovereigns, are foremost in setting us the example; and it depends upon ourselves to comfort ourselves, and say to ourselves: this is that which St. Paul foretold; and that which in the days of St. Paul I should have rejected as a dream, I see is evident, and past all doubt. Now, beloved Christians, a man whose cross (as St. Augustin finely expresses it) is gone from the infamous place of execution, to be made an ornament to the brows of emperors: a man, who without aid or arms, by the sole virtue of the cross, vanquished idolatry, triumphed over the power of superstition, destroyed the worship of false gods, conquered the whole universe: a man who, as the church sings, could reign where others cease to live, that is, could reign upon the rood, which was the instrument of his death: and, what is still more to be wondered at, a man who had declared in his life-time, that all this would

come to pass; "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw every thing unto me; this he said, signifying what death he should die;" (John xii.) is not such a man more than man? Is he not man and God, too? What virtue hath not the cross, on which we behold his image had, to make the people pay him adoration! How many apostles of his gospel; how many imitators of his virtues; how many confessors; how many martyrs; how many holy souls devoted to his worship; how many disciples fired with zeal for his honour and glory; or, in more comprehensive terms, how many nations; how many kingdoms; how many empires hath he drawn to him by the undiscoverable, but all-powerful virtue of this cross! "Christ crucified, the power of God."

Alas! my brethren, the Pharisees saw the miracles of this crucified God, and were not converted. This is almost incomprehensible. But tell me, is not that which happens in ourselves as incomprehensible? For we actually see a greater miracle in the death of Jesus Christ, a subsisting miracle, an averred and incontestable miracle: I mean the triumph of the cross; the world converted; the world made Christian; the world sanctified by the cross. "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw every thing unto me." This we see; and yet, notwithstanding this miracle, our faith is languid, weak, and unanimated. This we ought to lament with tears; this ought to make our blood run cold. But to profit by this mystery, instead of lamenting through a sentiment of a short, superficial devotion, let us lament in the spirit of salutary compunction. Jesus Christ worked miracles at his death; he must work another that will crown all the rest, and that is, the miracle of our conversion. He split rocks; disclosed sepulchres, and tore assunder the veil of the temple: the sight of the cross must split our hearts, perhaps harder than those rocks; it must disclose our consciences, perhaps to this time, shut up like sepulchres; it must tear our flesh, this flesh of sin, by the holy rigours of penitence. For why should not this dying God convert us, since he converted the perpetrators of his death? And when will he convert us, if not on this day, when his precious blood is shed in abundance for our salvation and sanctification?

Ye sinners who hear me, this it is that should fill you with confidence. As long as you are sinners, you are in that quality, enemies of Jesus Christ; you are his persecutors. Shall I say it?

and as St. Paul hath said it before me, why should I not say it? you are his executioners. For, as often as it happens that you yield to temptation, and commit sin, you crucify afresh the Saviour of men within yourselves. Let it be remembered, however, that the blood of this God-man hath had the power and efficacy to blot out the sin even of those Jews who spilt it. In this it is (says St. Augustin) that the virtue of Jesus Christ's redemption appeared; in this it is that he appeared a Saviour. Of his enemies he made chosen servants; of his persecutors he made saints. Sinners as you are, and how great soever, have you not, therefore, all imaginable right to hope in his divine mercy? Approach the sacred throne of his grace, which is his cross; but approach it with contrite and humble hearts; submissive hearts; hearts purified from the corruptions of the world; docile hearts, and susceptible of the impression of the heavenly spirit; for such is the miracle which this saving God would operate in you to-day by the virtue of his cross. Your return to God, a perfect return, after having gone astray so long; your repentance, an exemplary and speedy repentance, after so many scandals and disorders; the profession you shall make, an open profession of living like Christians, after having lived so long like libertines, is the miracle which will prove that Jesus Christ crucified, is personally the force and power of God.

Ah! my Lord, shall I be so happy as to find that this miracle is visibly accomplished in my hearers, as it was effectually accomplished in the soldiers who were present at your death, a great number of whom adhered to you, as to the author of their salvation? Will you give, O Lord! for that purpose, a sufficient blessing to my words? and may I entertain the pleasing hope, that, among those who hear my words, some will have the centurion's feelings; that is, will depart, after this discourse, not only affected, but converted; not only bathed in tears, but determined to glorify God by their good works; not only persuaded, but sanctified and moved by the Christian sentiments with which this first part shall have inspired them? Though the unbelieving Jews is scandalized at the cross; Jesus Christ dying is the power and force of God made flesh: "Christ crucified, the power of God." This you have seen in the first part. Though the Gentile laughs at it, and considers the cross as foolishness; Jesus Christ dying is the wisdom of God himself: "Christ crucified, the wisdom of God." This you shall see in the second part.

PART II. How just, how holy, how incomprehensible soever Almighty God is in all his works, and in his revealing himself to us; yet it is not surprising that man, on account of his pride, and ignorance, hath oftentimes taken upon him to censure the works of the Lord, and been so rash as to take scandal at them. The thoughts of man and those of God being, as the sacred text expresses it, since the fall of the first man, so opposite as they are to one another, this scandal was a necessary consequence of it in some measure. What should surprise us still more is, that man (as St. Gregory, pope, observes) is scandalized at the goodness of God; at the prodigies of the love of God; at the abundance and excess of the mercies of God. It was into this irregularity that the heresiarch Marcion fell, when, under the pretext of a false zeal for the Son of God, he would not believe that the Son of God either verily suffered upon the cross, or verily died upon it; as if the cross and death had been absolutely beneath the majesty and holiness of God. Against this error God raised up Tertullian, who openly attacked it, and was thereby considered as the champion of the sufferings, death, and passion of Jesus Christ; an error, which, notwithstanding the establishment of the Christian religion, is, perhaps, but too general at this day; an error against which my duty obliges me, on this occasion, to exert the whole force of the word of God. Renew your attention, I beseech you.

The mystery of a crucified God appears to modern philosophers, as well as to the Gentiles, a folly; and St. Paul, on the contrary, declares, that in regard to the elect and predestinate, it is a mystery of God's wisdom: "Unto them who are called, Christ crucified, the wisdom of God." Now let us examine which of the two, the apostle or the philosopher, hath formed the best and most rational judgment: the apostle, after being instructed in it by our Saviour himself in a miraculous manner; the philosopher, who knows nothing of it, but what hath been revealed to him by flesh and blood. Let us examine whether in this seemingly so sublime a mystery, and beyond the depth of our weak reason, there is, in fact, any thing repugnant to reason: for, God will not reject the judgment of our reason; and provided that our reason is neither prepossessed nor obstinate, he is willing to admit it into the council of his wisdom, and answer to the difficulties it may allege.

Which, and how many, beloved Christians, are the points in question, relatively to the present mystery? There are two,

(replies St. Leo,) both of them equally difficult and necessary; namely, to satisfy God, offended and dishonoured; and to reform man, perverted and corrupted. These were the ends for which Jesus Christ was sent, and to which the mission he received was directed. Now, I ask you: in order to attain these two ends, God as he was, could he have taken a more powerful, a more effectual, and a more infallible means than the cross? And can we ourselves, with all our supposed power of reasoning, imagine to ourselves another in which the proportions would be observed, I do not say with more, but with equal exactness? Let us go to Calvary, and having contemplated what passes there, let us study our religion, of which we have here the height and depth, which St. Paul so ardently wished to comprehend.

1st. Satisfaction must be made to God, and none but a God-made man can make it: this stands to reason. What hath this God-made man done? Alas! Christians, what hath he not done? Hath he not, with a view to cancel our debts, had the greatest care to pitch upon that which could solely and sovereignly fill up the measure of the satisfactions Almighty God expected, and had a right to expect? In what consisted the offence committed against God? In this, that man, forgetting himself, proudly affected to be like God: "Ye shall be as gods." And I, says God-made man, who am not only like to God, but equal and consubstantial with him, through a very different kind of forgetfulness of myself, will become the outcast of men: "a worm of the earth, and no man;" Ps. xxi.; for these are the very words the prophet makes him utter upon the cross. Is it possible to conceive a more authentic reparation? Man, by revolting against God, had shaken off the yoke of obedience, and violated the command of his sovereign; and I, says God, made man, quite independent as I am of myself, will freely submit to the most painful humiliations: "I will be obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Phil. ii. I will obey not only God, but men, nay, men the most criminal; the most vicious; the most sacrilegious, who are my persecutors and executioners; I will obey not only the wise, righteous, and equitable decrees of heaven, but those of the earth—full of injustice, iniquity, and cruelty; I will obey not only powers in whom there is no authority lodged over me, but powers combined to oppress and crush me; and by this voluntary submission, I will obliterate the crime of man, rebellious

to his Creator's law. Upon this very account it was (says St. Bernard) that he would not come down from the cross, choosing rather to leave the Jews in their incredulity, than to convince them by a miracle of his own will; and more desirous to fulfil and obey his Father's orders, than convert and save them by not obeying. Man, by a criminal intemperance in tasting the forbidden fruit, had indulged his palate with a forbidden pleasure; and I, says God-made man, who need refuse myself no delight, will present myself to my heavenly Father, as a man of sorrows; a victim of penitence; a lamb led to the bloody sacrifice. For, it was in his passion, that, animated with zeal for the glory and interests of Almighty God, he conceived this design, and carried it into execution: "Sacrifice and offering thou wouldst not, O God," says he, in the inmost recesses of his heart, at the moment he was crucified, as he had said, according to the testimony of St. Paul, when he came into the world—(mark these words, Christians, which so thoroughly express the ground-work and essence of this mystery)—"Sacrifice and offering thou wouldst not, but a body thou hast fitted to me. Burnt-offerings for sin have given thee no pleasure; then said I: Lo, I come." Heb. x. Venerable words, which even, according to the letter, should be understood of that which passed upon Mount Calvary; whereas it was there that Jesus Christ, in quality of high priest, terminated the sacrifice of the old law, by the consummation of the sacrifice of the law of grace. It was there, that, upon the altar of the cross, he solemnly sacrificed his divine person; it was there that he spilt his own blood, not the blood of goats and bulls: and, to speak in plainer, and more precise terms, it was there that he satisfied God; not by any thing foreign or extraneous, but by himself, and at his own cost. Now this is what I denominate the work of God's wisdom.

Further, this Saviour of men hath made us thoroughly comprehend that, which, of itself, was incomprehensible, and from a knowledge of which we should have been shut out to all eternity: what God is; what sin is; what salvation is. Three things, to which the whole wisdom of man is referred, and the knowledge of which, both for you and for me, was essentially annexed to the mystery of Christ Jesus dying on the cross. What is God? A being, for whose glory it was requisite that a God-man should be humbled and debased, even on the cross. This is the idea I conceive of him, on this occasion. Nothing else conveys a sufficient

knowledge of God. Whatever I discover respecting him in nature; whatever theology dictates concerning him; whatever the scriptures set forth, and the light of glory shall reveal relating to him, is, properly speaking, a shadow, and no more. On Mount Calvary it is, that faith makes me see, as it were, in the clearest point of light, this God as great as he is; because I there behold a God-man immolated, to make known what he is. Nor hath God himself (shall I venture to say it?) a more sublime idea of the divinity of his essence, than that he beholds himself glorified by the cross of a God-man; I say more, than that he would not be otherwise satisfied than by the cross of a God-man. What is sin? An evil for which it was necessary that a God-man should become anathema, and an object of malediction: "Being made a curse for us." Gal. iii. This is what the mystery of the cross exhibits to me. How sin could draw down upon us such terrible chastisements, was beyond my power of comprehending; and taking upon me to arraign and censure the decrees of God, I would know the reason of that dreadful eternity of pains which the rigour of his justice inflicts on the reprobated souls in hell. But I perceived my ignorance was such, that I had never thoroughly considered the mystery of Jesus Christ's death. For, the death of a God, ordained as a means necessary to the abolition of sin, makes me, more clearly than I would choose, understand the proportion there is between sin, which is an offence against the Almighty, and the eternal duration of hell, which is the punishment the sinner is doomed to. Admitting the one, there is no difficulty in the other. And convinced by Jesus Christ's own argument: "If they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in a dry?" Luke xxiii. If the Son and the innocent be thus treated, what will become of the slave and the culpable? I am no longer astonished at the rigour of God's judgments, or at the excess of his wrath and vengeance; but I am astonished at my own astonishment. What is the salvation of man? A good which hath cost the life of a God, and for which a God-man did not think the expenditure excessive, in making a sacrifice of himself. Such is the lesson which this divine Master teaches me, expiring on the cross. I made light of this salvation; and by my negligence exposed it to hazard. A vain interest, a false honour, a momentary pleasure, made me give it up. But come, (says this crucified God, by the voice of his blood,) come and see, by the expense of

what I suffer, how great the value of thy soul is. Thou esteemest thyself, but not sufficiently. Contemplate attentively thyself in me; thou wilt see what thou art, and what is thy value. Thou must prize thyself by my merits; for I am thy price; and that salvation, which thou givest up on so many occasions, is nothing but what I am myself, since I deliver myself up for the securing of it. In this manner, I say, he speaks to me. Now this alone were sufficient to make me conclude with St. Paul, that the mystery of the cross is, therefore, a mystery of the divine wisdom. For (as St Chrysostom argues) a mystery that gives me such high ideas of God; that inspires me with an infinite horror of sin; that makes me value my salvation preferable to all past, present, future, and even possible things, in whatever point of view I behold it, should appear in my eyes a mystery of wisdom. Sentiments so reasonable, so elevated and sublime, cannot be supposed to originate from an erroneous principle. Nothing but wisdom, nay, the wisdom of God, can impart them to me; and, for this reason, the apostle of the Gentiles, possessed with a belief of this mystery, made open profession of knowing nothing, except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. For in this crucified Jesus he found, in an excellent and compendious manner, whatever he wanted to know; that is, the eminent knowledge of God, and the salutary knowledge of himself: "I judged not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified."

2ndly. But let us dive farther into so edifying and wonderful a mystery, and discuss the second motive to the mission of Jesus Christ, and to his function as a Saviour. After satisfying God, the point was to reform man, who was fallen not only into irregularity, but into the extreme and abyss of all irregularities. This irregularity of man, (says St. John,) arose from three springs: from the lust of the eyes; from the lust of the flesh; and from the pride of life: that is, from an insatiable thirst of temporal possessions; a passionate desire of worldly honours; and an excessive attachment to the pleasures of the senses. The point was to cure these three great evils; and these are the remedies which the Son of God brought down from heaven for that purpose, and with which he presents us this day in his sacred passion: the want of every thing, and the nakedness in which he dies, against the inordinate love of riches, and the avarice that worries our hearts; the prodigious debasement to which he is reduced, against the

projects of ambition that prey upon us; the austcritles of a virgin flesh, embrued with blood, and torn with stripes, against the softness and sensuality that corrupt us. Infallible and sure remedies; remedies, which it depends on ourselves to apply to ourselves which it depends on ourselves to profit by; and in which appear all the providence, and all the wisdom of the Physician that prepares them for us. Let us beware of prepossession; and let us do justice to ourselves once, in order to do it to God eternally.

Is it not evident, beloved hearers, that the mystery of the cross hath an essential opposition to these three principles, from whence flow all the irregularities of our life? Is it not evident, that this mystery alone condemns all your injustices; all your violences; all your hatreds; all your scandalous communications; all your debaucheries? And doth it not evidently follow from thence, that it is a mystery in which the wisdom of God hath presided? Is it not evident, that what checks and moderates our desires, regulates our passions, confounds our pride; tears from our hearts the love of ourselve,s in a word, corrects all our vices, and keeps us to order, must be the effect of good order, and, by consequence, of the supreme wisdom which is in God? What a change would there be, if all mankind, with one unanimous consent, had agreed among themselves to live after the example of Jesus Christ, and after the lessons he hath taught them in his passion; so that this crucified God should be the rule by which the world was governed! To what an amazing degree of perfection would the world, now so corrupt, be raised at once! In what modesty would this view of the cross, which would always be present to them, inspire the great; and what submission it would teach the lower order? Would the rich make an ill use of their riches, and would the poor complain of their poverty? Would they who suffer, murmur against God in their sufferings; and would the prosperous ones of the world, forget God by forgetting themselves in their prosperity? Would revenge and treachery disgrace the ties of human society? Would self-interest take the lead in our determinations? Would jealousy and ambition foment and raise divisions and troubles? Would candour, probity, and uprightness, be discarded? Proportionably as men are now irregular, their conduct would be regulated by wisdom and justice; and their whole life adorned with innocence, purity, and truth.

But why was it requisite, that Jesus Christ, without partaking

of our evil doings, should experience the remedies in his own person? Ah! my brethren, (replies St. Augustin,) as these remedies are so bitter, how could he contrive it better than to experience them in his own person, in order to sweeten them, and induce us to adopt the use of them? How should we have been able by any other means to taste them? And in order to induce us to take them, was not the example of a God necessary? In the supposition that this God-man, instead of the cross, had chosen the comforts of life to save us; would not our self-love, the original cause of all corruption, have taken the advantage, and availed itself of it? In that case, could I with a good grace require of you, as I now do, the mortification of the senses; the crucifying of the flesh; the renouncing of yourselves; the humility of penance? And would not this idea of your God, in the splendor of honours and enjoyment of pleasures, be an unsurmountable prepossession against all my reasonings? But what force doth not this example of a God, dying upon the cross, give to my ministry and to my words? And have I not now sufficient authority to tell you, that you must be humble, mortified, and disengaged from worldly pomps? Which in the above supposition, I could not have done with advantage to you, nor credit to myself. Now, doth it not manifest the wisdom of God, that he enables the ministers of Jesus Christ, and preachers of his gospel, to silence you, when they preach and explain to you the most difficult duties of your religion, and put it out of your power to reply, when they reproach you with the extreme and seemingly unconquerable aversion you have to put them in practice? But why reform one excess by another excess? excess in man, by excess in God? And I say, what wisdom to have reformed excess of malignity, by excess of perfection! excess of iniquity, by excess of holiness! excess of gratitude, by excess of love! In order to withdraw man from the vices, into which he was by corrupt nature carried, was it not just and becoming he should lean to the opposite virtues? In the violence of his passion, would he have kept a just temperature between extremes? And was it not necessary, in order to extinguish in him the fire of avarice, ambition, and impurity; to make him love poverty, humility, and austerity? For, that he might save us in a perfect manner, it was not enough for Jesus Christ to come and tell us, these three vices were our destruction; it was necessary he should come in such a manner as should engage us to attack them, to

overcome them, and to banish them from our hearts. They were our destruction; for they debauched our reason, and poisoned our hearts; and if we had retained any love and esteem for them, we should not have been saved but by halves. It was necessary, therefore, that the virtues opposed to these vices, should become, not only supportable to us, but lovely, pleasing, precious, and venerable. Now for this purpose, what could the increated Word of God find more marvellous, than to consecrate them in his own person; to the end, (as St. Augustin excellently remarks,) the humility of man should have wherewith, in the humility of God, to support itself, and bear itself up against the attacks of pride?

And this, beloved Christians, I presume, is sufficient, not only to convince, but to confound our reason in the judgment of God: and heaven grant that this judgment of God, in which our reason must be convinced of its errors, and confounded, is not already in its commencement, respecting us. For, from this day forward, this dying Saviour hath taken it to himself, as his own province, to judge the world; and the cross was the first tribunal on which he appeared pronouncing decrees, either of life or of death; either in favour of man, or against him. It is not a particular sentiment with which piety inspires me, but a truth which faith teaches me, when I assert, that the judgment of God commenced at the moment the passion of Jesus Christ commenced, as he explains himself in such terms to his apostles: "Now is the judgment of this world." John xii. The holy evangelist means not to inspire us with vain terrors, when he assures us, that the cross, to which this God-man was nailed, will be produced at the end of the world, as a rule of the judgment which God will pass on us at the end of ages, and on the rest of mankind: "Then the sign of the Son of man shall appear." Matt. xxiv. Dreadful thought for a worldly man! The cross of Jesus Christ it is that will judge us; that cross, the enemy of our passions; that cross which we have honoured in speculation, but abhorred in practice; that cross which we ought to have turned to advantage, we have so often by our sins forfeited its merits. With this cross we shall be confronted: "Then the sign of the Son of man shall appear." Whatever shall not be conformed to it, will bear the character of reprobation. Now what resemblance can we discover between this cross and our libertinism; between this cross and our vanity; between this cross and our sensual life?

Ah! my Lord, shall we then be condemned by the greatest of your benefits, and the very pledge of our salvation? And shall that which was only intended to reconcile us to you, serve to render us more criminal, and more odious in your divine presence? But, on the other hand—comfortable thought for a faithful soul!—the cross of Christ Jesus it is that must determine his lot; that cross in which he placed his confidence; that cross which gave him strength and courage, and still inspires him with fresh resolution in his sufferings; that cross which he devoutly wishes to be the living image. O crucified God! receive my homage; approve the sentiments of my heart; and let your cross, after being the subject of my veneration, and still more the object of my imitation, be eternally for you and me—a token of benediction.

SERMON III.

ON THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD.

"*The angel making answer, said to the women: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified; he is risen, he is not here; behold the place where they laid him.*" MARK xvi.

THESE words are very different from those which we generally see engraven on the tombs of men. How powerful soever they may have been, what is the amount of those grand eulogiums given them, and which we read on those superb monuments erected to their memory by human vanity? To this melancholy inscription, *here lieth.* This grandee; this renowned conqueror; this man, so vaunted among the sons of men, notwithstanding all his power and greatness, under this marble stone lies blended with common dust. But far otherwise is the case with respect to Jesus Christ. Shut up in the bosom of the earth, he rises again the third day, victorious, and environed around with light, insomuch, that the devout women who came in quest of him; and who, not finding him, would know the reason of it, receive no other intelligence than that he is risen again: "He is not here." This, as Isaiah foretold, is what renders his sepulchre glorious. As the glory,

therefore, of the great ones of this world terminates in the grave, so it is in the grave that the glory of this God-man commences. It is there—it is, as I may say, in the centre of weakness that he chooses to exert his power; and that in the very arms of death he resumes a blissful and immortal life. An admirable change this, beloved Christians, which is to give stability to his church, administer comfort and spirit to his disciples, and be a lasting foundation to Christian faith and hope; for these are, or these ought to be, the effects of our Saviour' s resurrection, as I am going to make appear in this discourse.

And truly, Christians, one of the most solid foundations of our faith, and of our hope, is the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ. This I say with St. Augustin; and keeping to his thought, I find a division the most regular, and a plan the most complete, for a discourse upon this topic. For according to him, the Son of God exhibits to us at once, a great miracle, and a great example: a great miracle, to confirm our faith; and a great example, to quicken our hope. In fact, it is on the resurrection of our Saviour, that the two most important truths of Christianity are founded; one of which is, as it were, the basis of all religion; namely, that Jesus Christ is God: and the other, the source of all evangelical morals; namely, that we shall rise again ourselves one day, like Jesus Christ. This, therefore, beloved Christians, without further preface, is what I have, on this solemnity, to lay before you.

1st. The miracle of Jesus Christ's resurrection, is an incontestable proof of his divinity; and by that means he confirms our faith.

2ndly. The example of Jesus Christ's resurrection, is a certain pledge of our future resurrection; and by that means he animates our hope.

These two positions are of the utmost consequence. In the first of which, Jesus Christ will teach us, by his resurrection, what he is; and in the second, he will teach us what we shall be. Both the one and the other includes whatever is most elevated and sublime in the Christian religion. May heaven grant that they conduce equally to your instruction and edification.

Part I. It is an awful saying, beloved Christians, a saying that deserves to be heard with all the respect with which religion is capable of inspiring us, when St. Paul tells us, that the mystery of the resurrection hath planted in the world the belief of

the divinity of Jesus Christ; "who was predestinated the Son of God in power, by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ." Rom. i. Thus spoke the apostle, persuaded of the evidence, and affected with the greatness of this truth. We adore a Saviour, beloved brethren, who was predestinated the Son of God, in virtue of his glorious resurrection. Instead of predestinated, the Greek and Syriac versions have it manifested and declared; but these two versions St. Ambrose conciliates, by saying, that Jesus Christ, who was a hidden God in his incarnation, was, according to the order of his eternal predestination, to be a revealed God, and a known God in his resurrection. I doubt, beloved hearers, you have never considered another very remarkable proposition of the same apostle, in that excellent discourse he delivered before the people of Antioch, and which is recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. These are his words: "And we declare to you, that the promise which was made to our fathers, this same hath God fulfilled unto us their children, raising up Jesus Christ again; as in the second psalm it is written: THOU ART MY BELOVED SON, THIS DAY HAVE I BEGOTTEN THEE." Acts. xiii. What doth this mean, beloved Christians; and of what day doth the apostle speak? If it was that on which Jesus Christ, as Son of God, and the increated Word, was begotten of his Father, with what propriety could he apply it to the mystery of his resurrection? And if he understood it of the day on which Jesus Christ, as God-man, arose from the dead, according to the flesh, with what propriety could he mention his eternal generation? "Raising up Jesus, as it is written, this day have I begotten thee." What affinity is there between them? An admirable one, replies St. Ambrose. Never did the apostle speak more consequentially, because the resurrection of Jesus Christ was a second birth for him, but more happy and more advantageous than the first; as, being born, as it were, again of the sepulchre, he visibly displayed the character of Son of God in his person. And upon this account it is, that the eternal Father, in this mystery, owns him in a particular manner, and bespeaks him in these words, to be understood in a particular sense: "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee." Yes, my Son, it is on this day that I begot you a second time; but in a manner that makes out perfectly the greatness of your origin, and the truth of that divine existence which you received from me. As who should say, so long as you tarried

upon earth, though you were incontrovertably the Son of God, you were considered only, and treated in quality of Son of man. But now, that you triumph over death, and are regenerated to a life of glory, you bear so authentic a testimony to yourself of the divinity which dwells in you, that henceforward it cannot be a matter of debate; and although I have always been your Father, at all times, and from all eternity, I look upon it to-day as a special honour; distinguishing this blessed day from all the other days which have made up your eternal decree, and fixing it to declare to the universe, that you are my Son. "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee."

But let us examine this matter further; and in order to be well instructed in a truth so essential as this, let us see in what sense, and what manner it is true to say, that the resurrection of Jesus Christ establishes particularly the belief of his divinity. For, you will ask me, did not the Saviour of mankind, during the whole course of his mortal life, perform miracles that proved the sufficiency of the quality which he assumed of Son of God? Were not the dispossessing of demoniacs, the bestowing on the dark the enjoyment of light, the raising the dead to life, so many palpable and evident demonstrations of the extraordinary and wholly divine power that resided in him? What could there be more particular in his resurrection to confirm this belief? Be attentive, Christians; this is the difficulty, and, as it were, decisive point of the mystery I am treating of. I say, that the revelation of Jesus Christ's divinity was particularly annexed to his resurrection; "who was predestinated the Son of God, by the resurrection of the dead;" and that for four reasons, or rather for one reason included in these four propositions, because his resurrection was the proof which Jesus Christ was to give the Jews, in order to make them know his divinity; because this, in fact, was the most natural and most convincing proof of his divinity; because of all the miracles which Jesus Christ wrought by the power of his divinity, there was not one of which the evidence was so incontestable as that of the resurrection of his body; and because it is that which hath been of all the most conducive to the propagation of the faith, and the planting of the gospel, of which the substance and the sum are, to believe in Jesus Christ, and confess his divinity: upon which account, the Christians of the first ages, desirous of expressing in one word, the idea they conceived of our Saviour's resur-

rection, by a usage they received among themselves, called it simply the *testimony*. Insomuch, that the emperor Constantine, having built a magnificent church in the new Jerusalem, under the title of "Jesus Christ Risen," gave it the denomination of *martyrium*, that is, testimony. And St. Cyril, patriarch of that city, gives the reason of it; namely, that this church was consecrated to a mystery which Almighty God himself had chosen to bear solemn testimony to the divinity of his Son. This you shall see, beloved Christians, in the exposition of these four articles which I am now going to elucidate.

1st. For, in the first place, is it not an excellent remark, that as often as Jesus Christ is pressed in the gospel by the Jews, relatively to a proof of his divinity, he never gives any but his resurrection, which he makes use of either to convince their understandings, or to confound their incredulity? This unbelieving people (says he) require a miracle to be ascertained of what I am; and no other miracle shall they have than that of the prophet Jonas, or rather than that which was typified by the prophet Jonas; namely, that after having been shut up three days in the bowels of the earth, I shall come forth from it, as Jonas came forth from the whale's belly: "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and a sign shall not be given it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas." Matt.xii. You ask me, (he adds,) addressing himself to the Pharisees, by what miracle I prove that I have a right to use the absolute power and independent authority I attribute to myself: "What sign dost thou show us, seeing thou doest these things?" John ii. Now it is from hence that I would have you form your judgment of it. I show it by this; that after you shall have destroyed, by a cruel and violent death, this visible temple, which is my body, I will restore it to its pristine state, nay, a state more perfect than it was in before. "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." John ii. Be pleased, Christians, to take notice. He might have alleged a hundred other miracles, which he had worked in the midst of them, and before their eyes; but he chooses to suppress them all. And, indeed, one would imagine, that when he performed them, he had nothing less in view than to make his divinity known to mankind. For, if he changes water into wine at the marriage-feast, it is, as it were, through a constrained and filial deference to his mother's request. If he dispossesses the Chanaan woman's daughter, it is to get rid of that woman's

importunity. If he restores the widow's son to life, it is through mere pity and compassion. Moreover, in the greatest part of these supernatural actions, after the operation of his omnipotence, he recommends secrecy to those who have experienced the virtue of it. And when to three disciples he discovers the glory of his transfiguration, where his heavenly Father, speaking in person, acknowledges him for his beloved Son, he forbids them to publish a tittle of it before his resurrection: "Tell the vision to no man, till the Son of man be risen from the dead." John xvii. The reason of it is, (St. Chrysostom tells us,) that the resurrection of Jesus Christ having been ordained by Almighty God to be the sign of his divine filiation, it was his resurrection that was to have set the seal of authenticity to all the other miracles, and be their finishing and consummate proof. On this one was hinged the belief of all the rest. For this Saviour of men having said: "I am equal to my Father, God as he is;" and to make good what I advance, "I will rise from the dead the third day after my death." If he had not been what he said he was, he could not possibly have risen from the dead, because Almighty God, in that case, by concurring to the miracle of his resurrection, would have authorised an imposture and a lie. If, therefore, he rose again, after this declaration, it is a necessary consequence that he must have been God. As he was God, all his other miracles subsisted, because it is natural to a God to work miracles. And on the other hand, if he had not risen again, the belief of his divinity would have been destroyed by his own declaration; his divinity destroyed; his miracles would be no longer of force; his words would have been falsities; his life, artifice and delusion; all Christian faith a chimerical phantom. And this is the literal sense of that passage in St. Paul: "If Christ be not risen again, then is our preaching vain, and vain also is your faith." 1 Cor. xv. All this, as I said, because Jesus Christ had made the resurrection of his body the distinguishing characteristic of his divinity.

2ndly. But why did he choose that, preferably to all others? Ah! Christians, what could he choose more glorious or more striking, than to raise himself from death to life? Miracles (says St. Augustin) are for intelligent beings, the language and the voice of God; and of all miracles the greatest is, the resurrection of the dead. But of all resurrections, (continues this holy doctor,) is it not much the greatest to give one's self life, and to raise one's self by our own

power? It was not, therefore, without reason that Jesus Christ insisted particularly on this sign, to make it appear that he was God, and the Son of God. In reality, none but God can with propriety say: "I have power to lay down my life, and I have power to take it up again." John x. One is as easy to me as the other; and as I shall quit it only when I will, so I shall resume it when I please. None, I say, but God, can express himself in this manner. Before Jesus Christ came into the world, (mind this observation of St. Ambrose, an observation equally solid and ingenious)—before Jesus Christ came into the world, men had been restored to life, but restored by other men. Elisha, by his breath, had infused life into the dead body of the Shunamite's son; and the child of the widow woman of Zarephath, who died through weakness, and a decay of nature, had been, by the prayer of Elijah, brought to life, and delivered in full vigour and strength to his disconsolate mother. But (as St. Ambrose well observes) they who then were restored, received not life but by a power not their own, and they who performed those miracles performed them in persons not themselves. The unheard-of miracle was, that the same man performed at one and the same time, the two-fold miracle of giving life, and raising himself from the dead: "From the beginning of the world, it hath not been heard." John ix. And this is the miracle which the heavenly Father reserved for his Son, to let the world see that he was at one and the same time, God and man; man, inasmuch as he was raised from death to life; and God, inasmuch as he raised himself from death to life. An adorable mystery, which St. Jerom, who was gifted with a particular penetration to understand and explain the scriptures, observes, in these words of the psalmist, which even, according to the letter, are so applicable to Jesus Christ, that they cannot be applied to anything else: "I am counted with them that go down into the pit; I am as a man that hath no strength, free among the dead." Ps. lxxxvii. That is, Christians, Jesus Christ entered into the regions of death, not as a subject, but as a sovereign; not as depending on its laws, but as enjoying a perfect liberty, "Free among the dead." So that to return from it by the way of resurrection, he wanted nothing but himself: no prophet to pray for him, to command him to rise, to draw him by violence out of the sepulchre; because, being God, he needed no aid but that of his own omnipotent virtue: "I am as a man that hath no strength, free among the dead." Words,

(says St. Jerom,) which the Holy Ghost seems to have dictated as an epitaph for Jesus Christ about rising from the dead.

3rdly. It is therefore, true, that the resurrection of this God-man was the most authentic proof he could give of his divinity; and therefore it was, that the whole synagogue conspired against him, and used their utmost endeavours to hinder the belief of this resurrection from progressing in the world. All the Jews were persuaded, that if it were once believed upon good grounds, that Jesus Christ was risen again, from that moment he would possess the glorious qualities of Messiah and Son of God. But what came to pass? By a wonderful dispensation of the divine Providence; of all the articles of our religion, or rather, of all the miracles on which our religion is founded, there is not one of which the reality is so undeniable, or of which the evidence is so incontestable; insomuch that, according to St. Augustin, if even a pagan and an infidel should examine and scrutinize, without prepossession, all the circumstances of this miracle, he would be forced to admit and acknowledge the truth of it. And what is still more surprising, continues this holy doctor, is, that the two things which naturally should have been obstacles to the belief of this resurrection; namely, the hatred of the Pharisees, and the then incredulity of the apostles, are the means the Almighty makes use of to support and corroborate it. Yes, the most inveterate enemies of Jesus Christ have, in spite of them, contributed by their very hatred, to verify the miracle of the resurrection, and, by consequence, to plant our faith. For take notice, Christians; scarce is the breath out of the body of Jesus Christ, but they make application to Pilate; and what for? We remember, (say they,) that this seducer said, while he was living, I will rise again the third day after my death. For this he pledged himself to the public; and he desired that this might be the test, whereby it should appear, whether or not he were true and faithful to his words. The people were anxious about the event of this prediction; and if his body should now disappear, nothing more would be requisite to confirm so pernicious an error: it is of the utmost importance, therefore, to conduct this affair with the greatest diligence and circumspection; and our business with you is, that you would give a sanction and weight to what we do in this respect. Go, (answers Pilate,) you have guards at hand, use your own discretion; I empower you to do as you think proper. Accordingly, the sepulchre is instantly surrounded by a band of

soldiers; the stone which closed the entrance of it is sealed; nothing is omitted to make it all secure. What is the result of all this forecast? Only to remove the smallest doubt, and slightest suspicion respecting the resurrection of Jesus Christ. For what could the Pharisees say, when, notwithstanding such precautions and such assiduity, the body of our Saviour, three days after it was entombed, could not be found? That his disciples in the night, and while the guard were asleep, carried it away? But (replies St. Augustin) how was it possible to come to the sepulchre, lift up the stone, and carry off the body, without waking one of the soldiers? Besides, if the guard were asleep, how did they know that it was carried off; and who were they that carried it off? And if the guard were not asleep, how comes it that they suffered it to be carried off? What likelihood that the disciples, so remarkably weak, and such noted cowards, should all at once be inspired with courage, and become so resolute as to endanger their persons, spurn at the soldiery, and bear away a body deposited under the seal of government? Moreover, admitting that they had the spirit to do all this, to what purpose should they make others believe a thing, of which they knew themselves the falsity? What advantage could they derive from it, or expect to gain by it? For if they had carried away the body, it was very evident that Jesus Christ was not risen, and that he had deceived them; and as they had exposed themselves to the hatred of the whole nation upon his account, it was very natural, that being thus imposed upon, far from still supporting his interest, they would give him up, and declare to the magistracy that he was an impostor. A testimony which the whole synagogue would have received with general applause, and which would have gained them the affection and esteem of the people at large; whereas, by publishing his resurrection, they had nothing to look for but the most rigorous torments, persecutions, dungeons, scorpion-whips, and death itself.

4thly. This, however, is the only subterfuge the Jews have, to elude the miracle of Christ's resurrection: his disciples have taken away his body. It is not the gospel alone that informs us of this particular, but Justin Martyr, than whom, as he had been of the Jewish religion, no one could ever have a greater knowledge of their traditions. They have propagated a story, (says he,) that the sepulchre had been broke open. But the lie was so evident, that the resurrection of our Saviour was taken for granted among

the people. Josephus himself admits the fact, however inclined he might be to spread a cloud over the glory of the Son of God. And to the end that Paganism, as well as Judaism, should render homage to this God risen from the dead; Pontius Pilate, as it is recorded by Tertullian, being informed of the truth, and already a Christian in conscience, wrote to Tiberius, a circumstantial account of the matter. But what particularly surprises me, and what we cannot sufficiently admire, is, to see the apostles, who, during the life-time of their Master, could not so much as comprehend what he said, respecting his resurrection; and who rejected, after his death, as fables and reveries, whatever was told them of his apparitions; to see, I say, men ill-disposed to believe, or rather determined not to believe, become the preachers and martyrs of a mystery, which had been, till then, the most usual subject of their incredulity, appear before the judges of the earth, and confess a resurrection which, till then, they had considered as a matter of scandal; dare spill their blood to confirm the truth of it, and think themselves happy, provided that by dying, they should serve Jesus Christ, glorious and triumphant, as faithful witnesses. What wrought this change in them? What had the power of working it in them, but the assurance and belief of his resurrection? Is it not clear and evident, that so firm a belief, after so obstinate an incredulity, was "a change by the right hand of the Most High?" Ps. lxxvi. Accordingly, it is in virtue of this belief, I say—a belief of so miraculous a resurrection, that the gospel hath made such inconceivable progress in the world; and that the divinity of our Saviour, in spite of hell, and all its powers, hath been believed, and adored in the most remote corners of the earth? We need no more than consider the origin and first rise of the Christian religion. Never did the apostles preach Jesus Christ in the synagogue, but they produced his resurrection as a plain and undeniable proof: "Him God raised up the third day," (Acts xx.) and glorified, by delivering him from the shades of death. You sacrificed him; but he since hath appeared in the state of a new life. One would imagine it was the only article that rendered their preaching efficacious and invincible. For in what did they discover the force of that apostolical zeal with which they were replenished? In bearing witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. "With great power the apostles bore witness to the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ." Acts xx. In this consisted

the whole care and fruit of their ministry: insomuch, that when it was necessary they should proceed to the choosing of another disciple in the room of the perfidious Judas, the principal reason they alleged for it was, that having seen the things they had seen, and bearing the relation they did to the Saviour of mankind: "One must be ordained to bear witness with them of his resurrection." Acts xx. As if their apostleship had been reduced to this one point; and, indeed, (as St. Luke adds,) the whole world submitted to the cogency of this evidence. The Jews could not resist it; the Gentiles were persuaded of it; the number of the Christians increased every day; and we learn from St. Chrysostom, that presently after the profession of faith which the catechumens made, by acknowledging that Jesus Christ was risen from the dead, the sacrament of baptism was conferred on them. The reason is: that to profess the resurrection of Jesus Christ, was to profess that he was God; and to profess that he was God, was to profess his religion; inasmuch as it is indubitable, that the whole Christian religion is founded in the divinity of Jesus Christ; and that the divinity of Jesus Christ was not authentically revealed to us, but by the miracle of his resurrection.

Here let us stop: and to correspond with the will of God in this mystery, let us raise ourselves up, by sentiments of faith, above our own meanness. Let us, if I may venture to express myself, go into the sanctuary of Christ's divinity, which is open to us; and let us say, with the old man in the Revelation, prostrate before the throne of the Lamb: "The Lamb that is killed is worthy to receive power and divinity." Apoc v. In adoring his divine essence, let us make the same protestation that St. Peter did to our divine Saviour: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Matt. xvi. Or, to conceive it in terms the stronger, and the more energetic, as they are more simple and more natural, let us make use of the expression of St. Thomas Didymus: "My Lord and my God;" an expression which heretofore put the Arian heresy to confusion, and which will remain to the end of ages, unanswerable to the infidelity of libertines. Whereas St. Thomas, and the other apostles, before the resurrection of the Son of God, were content to accost him with Master, Lord; now that he is risen from the dead, let us look upon it as our bounden duty, to call him, over and over again: "My Lord and my God." And that you are my Lord and my God, you let me see so very evi-

dently in your resurrection, that I have almost reason to fear, lest by that means my faith may lose some part of its merit. For I perceive my soul pernetrated with the living light that beams from your sacred humanity; the rays, as it were, of the divinity which it includes. I did not thoroughly comprehend St. Paul's meaning, when he tells the Hebrews, that the eternal Father, "when he bringeth in the first-begotten into the world, he saith: And let all the angels of God adore him." Heb. i. But now I clearly see the reason of it; and it is this: that Jesus Christ, by rising from the dead, showed the whole universe that he was God; and that adoration is the peculiar worship of God, and appropriated solely to God. Upon this acccunt it was, that the eternal Father would have this worship paid solemnly to Jesus Christ, "by all the angels of God." To know the reason why he gives this order to the angels, and not to men, St. Jerom, explaining this passage, tells us it will afford us instruction indeed, but will put us to confusion. For he did not address himself to the angels, but from the anticipated knowledge he had of the ingratitude, obduracy, and insensibility of men; and because he foresaw that men, far from adoring Jesus Christ in truth, would outrage him, blaspheme him, and by the irregularity of their lives, would load him with shame, dishonour and scandal. True it is, that it was more the duty of men, than of the angels, to adore this God rising from the sepulchre, as he did it for their, not the angels' salvation. But the strange irregularities of men; the libertinism of some, and hypocrisy of others; the pride of many, and sordidness of more, determined God the Father to have recourse to the angels, as more faithful creatures, when he thought it proper to procure for his only begotten Son the tribute of honour due to him, in consequence of his resurrection: "When he bringeth in the first-begotten into the world, he saith: And let all the angels of God adore him." As if he had said, let the angels be his adorers, since men are impious, and scandalize him. For with this it is, that each of us should, on this great day, reproach himself in the bitterness of his soul; a reproach sufficient to rouse us from the lethargic indolence into which we are fallen, and give new life to our drooping faith; a reproach which consequently would work our conversion, and a total change in our morals.

And, indeed, this belief in the divinity of Jesus Christ, hath sanctified the world; and is it not by this same belief, that the

world, with which we are infatuated, and the maxims of which corrupt us, must be sanctified in us? If I have this belief, either I am righteous, or I am in the way of being so. If I have it not, there is nothing in me but sin and iniquity. "Who is it," says the beloved disciple, "that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" 1 John v. That is, who is he, that, keeping a strait and watchful hand on the reins of his passions, is regular in his conduct, moderate in his desires, continent, patient, charitable, except it be he who suffers himself to be ruled and governed by the faith of his saving God? On the other side, who is he that remains a constrained slave of the world, and of its lusts, of its ambition, of its interest, of its sensuality, unless it be he who hath given up this faith, or in whom this faith is decayed and languid? "Who is it that overcometh the world, but he who believeth that Jesus is the Son of God." Give an attentive ear to the voice of experience, and it will inform you with how great reason the apostle spoke. Human prudence fancied she might subsist, independently of this faith; and, therefore, hath exerted her whole endeavours to emancipate herself from it. But we know the success she met with, and the consequences of that criminal independence. We have seen Christians become sceptics and free-thinkers, and, relinquishing Jesus Christ, confine themselves to the belief of one God. But by a secret disposition of the divine Providence, their philosophy hath only served to show the weakness of their heads, and the wickedness of their hearts. It should seem, that, from the knowledge of a God, they would naturally become wise and virtuous. But as we cannot be solidly virtuous or wise, except by divine grace, as grace is annexed to Jesus Christ; as Jesus Christ is of no avail to us, independently of faith; as faith, which unites us with him, is that which reveals his divinity: hence, with all those fine ideas of wisdom, they turned out fools and madmen; they suffered themselves to be carried away by the torrent of vice; they yielded to the most shameful passions; they lost themselves (as St. Paul says) in their own cogitations; and, aspiring to the dignity of philosophers, sunk even below the level of men. Where, on the contrary, have purity of life, and innocence been found? In that holy and divine faith, which teaches that "Jesus is the Son of God." This is what justifies us; this is what lays the treasures of grace and virtue open to us; this is what gives us access to God, in order

one day to take part in that blessed resurrection which is promised us. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is an incontestable proof of his divinity: it is thereby he confirms our faith. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a certain pledge of our future resurrection: it is thus he animates our hope, as you shall see in the second part.

PART II. St. Augustin tells us, that of all the articles in our religion, not one hath been more controverted than the resurrection of the flesh, because not one more effectually restrains men within the bounds of duty, or makes them more subject to the divine law. For, admitting once that we must rise again, it follows, that therefore there is another life; that therefore our hopes go beyond the grave; that therefore we have a lot to expect, good or bad, in eternity. God Almighty, therefore, reserves us for other rewards or punishments than those we behold. Our chief business, therefore, in this life, is, to labour all we can for obtaining one, and avoiding the other; we ought, therefore, to direct all our actions to this end, and every thing else ought, therefore, to be indifferent to us; we are, therefore, to blame, for being disturbed at the miseries and afflictions of this world, and for being deceived by the dazzling splendor of human prosperities: virtue alone is, therefore, upon earth, our greatest good, nay, our only good. For, all these consequences are regularly deducible from the principle, that the dead will rise again. It is for this reason that Tertullian begins the work which he composed upon this subject with these words: "The confidence of Christians is the resurrection of the dead." On the contrary, (says St. Paul,) if we are not to rise again, and our hopes are confined to the happiness of this life, we are the most wretched of mankind: for, whatever we do is of no avail. In vain do we labour under so many dangers; in vain have I undergone at Ephesus so many conflicts for the faith. There needs no rule or measure to be attended to in our conduct; and full scope and indulgence may be allowed the senses in all they desire. Filial duty and piety are imaginary virtues; and nothing should influence our conduct but the present advantage. Take notice, Christians: from the error which denies the resurrection of the flesh, the apostle drew all these conclusions, by a theological ratiocination, the whole force of which there are but few who thoroughly comprehend, but which St. Chrysostom hath clearly shown, by pointing out to us against whom St. Paul's controversy was directed. It was not (this father observes) against heretics,

who acknowledged the immortality of the soul, but would not admit the resurrection of the body; that would have answered no purpose: but his argument was wholly levelled at libertines and atheists, who deny the resurrection of the body, because they do not wish to believe the immortality of the soul, or of a future state. For though these two errors are not necessarily and absolutely connected with one another, they are joined inseparably in the opinion of unbelievers, who, endeavouring to banish from their minds every idea of whatever relates to eternity, in order to sin with greater impunity, would, in the first place, abolish a belief in the resurrection of the body; and by an almost inevitable progress of infidelity, become so strangely infatuated as to believe that souls are not immortal. And this is the reason why the apostle uses the same arms in discomfiting these two monsters of irreligion.

Be that as it may, I say, Christians, to keep within the verge of my subject, that in the resurrection of Jesus Christ we have an evident and certain pledge of our own resurrection; for in the resurrection of our Saviour, we find at once, the cause, the motive, and the model, of our own. The cause, or power, by which God can effect our resurrection; the motive, through which he wills it; and the model upon which he effects it. This requires all your reflection and consideration.

1st. In the first place, I affirm, that we find in the resurrection of the Son of God, the cause of our own, for that miraculous resurrection, so far as it regards our blessed Saviour, arises from a supreme and uncircumscribed power. For if by his omnipotence he could raise himself to life, why may he not do to others, what he did in his own person. This is St. Augustin's argument, and an unanswerable one it is. There are, (says this father,) who believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and who subscribe to the testimony of the scriptures upon that head. But how faithful soever they may be in this respect, they corrupt their belief, and plunge into an error, by not comprehending, or by being unwilling to comprehend, how it follows from thence, that we ourselves shall one day revive. Now, (adds this father,) is not Jesus Christ's resurrection, in a similar flesh to mine, and arisen by his own power, an evident proof, that I shall one day, not indeed rise myself as he did, but be brought to life by his power? If, according to the false notions of the Manicheans, (continues St. Augustin,) he had assumed, when he came down upon earth, an

ideal and apparent body only; if he had left in sepulchral corruption, the flesh which was formed in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and which he was clothed with, in order to live among mankind; if, when he resumed a life of glory, he had resumed a body of a different nature from mine, a body of a more refined substance, and composed of more perfect qualities, I might question, perhaps, my resurrection. But, to-day he rises from the dead, with the same flesh and blood he had, when conceived in the chaste womb of the Virgin Mary. And why should I doubt that what I see come to pass in him, may not also come to pass in me? For hath he not as much power in me, as he hath in himself, and for himself? And if the power be always the same, will it not be at all times in a condition to work the same miracles.

It is by this supreme power, therefore, that he will go into the depths of the sea, into the bowels of the earth, into the recesses of caves and caverns, into the most gloomy and most hidden places in the world, to gather together the remains of ourselves which death had destroyed, and to collect our dispersed ashes; and, insensible as they will be, to give them voice, corporeal organization, and life.

This is perfectly conformable to that which St. Paul said (addressing himself to the primitive Christians): Jesus Christ, my brethren, (says he,) is risen again: that he is risen, is preached to you, and you believe it. But what amazes me, (adds this great apostle,) is, that notwithstanding this God-man is risen again, there should be some among you who dare contest the resurrection of men. "Now if Christ be preached that he arose again from the dead, how do some among you say, that there is no resurrection of the dead." 1 Cor. xv. Is not one a consequence of the other? For is it not this arisen God, "who shall reform the body of our lowliness?" Phil. iii. But in what manner will he perform this miracle? Will it be only by the efficacy of his intercession? Will it be only by the virtue of his merits? To these interrogatories St. Chrysostom answers in the negative; and St. Paul himself gives us to understand, that it will be by the absolute dominion which God-made man hath over all nature: "According to the operation whereby also he is able to subdue all things to himself." Phil. iii.

And this was the doctrine even of the patriarch Job, whom God inspired, three thousand years before Jesus Christ, to speak

of it with such precision and strength, and to foretel in terms so clear the resurrection both of our Saviour and of us. "I believe," says he, encouraging himself to bear his sufferings with manly fortitude, "I believe that my Redeemer liveth, and that in the last day I shall rise from the earth." Job xix. Did you observe the admirable connexion he makes between these two resurrections, that of his Redeemer Christ and his own? What would he have said, had he lived in our days, and been, as we are, witness to the glorious resurrection of the Son of God, in which we find not only the cause, but moreover the motive of ours.

2ndly. For, is it not natural that there should be a union between the subordinate members and the head? And when the head rises himself, doth it not follow that he will rise his members too? Now Christ Jesus is our head, and we are every one of us his members. Well may I, therefore, apply to this mystery what St. Leo said of the triumphant ascension of our Saviour into heaven, that where the head goes, there the members should follow him. And as Christ Jesus is not returned into the abode of his glory for his own sake only, but also for ours, that is, in the view of laying its gates open to us, and calling us thither; have I not a right, by the same rule, and in the same sense, to conclude, that it was for us he broke down the barriers of death, came forth from the sepulchre, and rose again to life? And, indeed, if in quality of head he requires, that his members do as he does, live as he does, die as he does? why should not he have them rise again to life as he does? Is it not agreeable to reason, that as we participate in his labours, we should participate in his reward? and forasmuch as part of his reward is the glory of his body, in that his adorable body is entered into a participation of merits with his soul, hath he not thereby pledged himself to reward in us likewise both body and soul? This is St. Paul's excellent theology; and, therefore, it is, that this great apostle calls "the first-fruits of death, (1 Cor. xv.) the first-born among the dead." Col. i. First-fruits suppose that others are coming after; and in order to be the first-born, or, if you like that better, the first risen from among the dead, the dead must also be born again at the end of ages, and resume a new life. And so incontestable is this truth, according to the doctrine of St. Paul, that he tells us, without hesitation: "If there be no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen again." 1 Cor. xv.

3rdly. It is true, therefore, beloved Christians, that we shall rise again through Jesus Christ, that is, through the omnipotence of Jesus Christ; it is true, that we shall rise again, because Jesus Christ is risen again; and, to crown our hope, I add, that we shall rise like unto Jesus Christ, and that his resurrection is the model of ours. For, (St. Augustin asks,) why would God make the resurrection of his Son so clear and evident, and why did the only begotten Son himself use such infallible methods to make it known, and the knowledge of it spread abroad? Ah! (replies this holy doctor,) it was to show us clearly and evidently, in his own person, the just extent of our pretensions, what we ought to be, or what at least it depends upon ourselves to be. All, therefore, I have to do, is, to represent to myself whatever is most striking, great, and admirable, in the triumph of my Saviour. I need no more than contemplate his glorified humanity: his body, material as it is, invested with all the qualities of spirits, emitting beams of living light, and crowned with an everlasting splendor; such is the happy situation to which I shall myself be raised, and such is the consolatory promise which faith makes me. And this hope is founded on the very words of God, whereas it is founded on the words of his apostle. For (says the apostle) when God Almighty shall draw our bodies from common dust, and vivify them with his breath, it will be to conform them to the divine copy he proposes to us in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, "who will reform the body of our lowliness, made like to the body of his glory." Phil. iii. These bodies are at present subject to corruption and rottenness, to sufferings, afflictions, pains and death; a vile, despicable lump of flesh. But then, by a change the most speedy and wonderful, they will have, if I may venture so to speak, the same incorruptibility, the same impassibility, the same immortality, the same subtilty, the same brightness, as the body of a God, "made like to the body of his glory." Nevertheless, my brethren, all this is attended with a condition; namely, that we shall labour in the present life to sanctify them by mortification, and Christian penitence. For if we have indulged these bodies, and afforded them whatever a sensual appetite demanded, and thereby made them bodies of sin, they will rise; but how? as objects of horror, to the confusion and shame of the soul, to share in her torment, after having participated in her crimes.

Ah! Christians, these are great and eternal truths; and wo be to

those who do believe in them, but live as though they disbelieved them! But happy, thrice happy, the faithful Christian, who, not content to believe them, makes them the rule of his life, and draws powerful motives from them, to animate his fervour! Let us endeavour to discuss accurately and attentively so important and so great a subject.

Wo, I say, to those who do not believe this essential point of Christianity, and this future resurrection! If there were any of these libertines among my hearers, this is what I would tell them, with all the sincerity, and with all the ardour of my zeal. Surely, brother, you must lead a very disorderly life, and vice must have deeply infected your heart, to make you disbelieve such fundamental truths of religion. Great, indeed, must be the corruption of your heart, to blind, mislead, and pervert your understanding to that degree. For, tell me, I pray you, if yet you are capable of yielding to this kind of argument, which of us stands upon the securest ground—you who disbelieve whatever is told you of a life to come, and a resurrection of the dead; or I, who believe it with a steadfast faith, and entire submission? What grounds have you for not believing it, or even for doubting it? Your own judgment, your own wisdom, or rather presumption. You do not believe these mysteries, because they are beyond your comprehension, because you would measure all things by the senses, because you will put your trust in nothing but your own eyes; because you say, like the incredulous apostle: "Except I shall see, I will not believe;" (John xx.;) a conduct full of ignorance and error, and yet the foundation of your infidelity. But I, in my belief, and in the faith which I have embraced, (a faith for which I should be ready to spill the last drop of my blood,) ground my reliance on the testimony of God himself; on the principles of his divine Providence; on the concurrence and irrefragability of a thousand prophecies; on a number, almost infinite, of undoubted miracles; on the authority of the greatest men of the age, men of fine sense, clear conception, irreproachable morals, and holy conversation. I find myself in possession of a faith, which hath wrought so many miracles throughout the universe; which hath triumphed over so many kings and people; which hath destroyed and abolished so many superstitions; which hath produced and reduced to practice so many virtues; which hath been confirmed by so many witnesses; which hath been signed with the blood of so many holy martyrs; which hath

increased, even by persecutions, and against which all the powers of hell and of the world have not been able to prevail: for these reasons it is that I am attached to it. Now I leave you to judge, once more, whether these reasons, or yours, are founded on a more solid basis; and whether they are not more capable to determine, fix, and give steadiness to an upright mind.

If it be objected, that this resurrection of the dead is incomprehensible, I say, beloved hearers, that the point is not to comprehend it, in order to believe it, but to believe it, although you do not comprehend it. For whether you comprehend it or not, it is not founded in truth, and certainly the less for that, and consequently, not the less credible. Nevertheless, my dear brother, I have great reason to be surprised, that you, who plume yourself on the strength of your understanding, should start so many difficulties against it. Would you insinuate that this resurrection is not possible to God our Creator? If he could create (says St. Augustin) our bodies out of nothing, why may he not, a second time, form them out of their own matter? And what can hinder him from re-producing that which existed in times past, since he could draw corporeal substances out of a state of non-existence? Do you imagine that this resurrection was not even an easy work for God, since he is all-powerful, and nothing can resist an unlimited power? Do not all creatures give a sample of this resurrection? A grain of corn dies in the bosom of the earth, (it is a comparison of St. Paul's,) and in effect, this little grain must rot and die; but do we not see it spring up again, and re-exist? And is it not strange, that what divine Providence intended to render most intelligible, should be the thing which makes you doubt your resurrection? Is not this resurrection agreeable to the principles of nature, which, by a mutual inclination of body and soul, and the close connexion which subsists between them, requires they should be re-united to all eternity? Hath it not been at all times one of the most universal and prevailing opinions throughout the world? Even they, (says Tertullian,) who will not admit the resurrection, acknowledge it, whether they will or not, by their ceremonies for the dead. The care they take to preserve the tombs, and to preserve the ashes in them, is a testimony the more divine, as it is more natural. The belief, (he adds,) that we shall all be one day brought to life, is not confined to Jews and Christians; we find it among the most barbarous

people, among pagans and idolaters. Nor is it merely a vulgar opinion, the wise and learned are agreed in it. Moreover, God hath made the belief of resurrection easy to us, by resurrections which have been seen, declared, and attested by the most irreproachable witnesses; resurrections not to be questioned, without spurning the inspired writings, and historians the most authentic.

Alas! Christians, let us see where the evil springs, and there you may learn to know yourselves. You find it difficult to persuade yourselves that there is another life, a resurrection, a judgment at the end of the world; because thereby you would be obliged to reform your conduct, and you dread the consequences of it. But are the consequences of your libertinism less to be feared, or less dreadful? God, independently of your will, created you without you; and without you, and in spite of you, he will rise you to life. Your resurrection will not depend upon your belief; but the happiness or the misery of your resurrection will depend upon your belief, and upon your former life. Now what a surprise and despair will seize you, at that last day, if you rise again, to hear the melancholy, solemn decree of your reprobation; if you rise again to go forth from the shades of death, into the dark abyss of hell; if you rise again to consummate, by the re-union of your soul and body, your damnation, because, in a matter of such importance, you would not follow the wisest and most secure rule, which is, to believe and live righteously!

I say, to live righteously; and this is the misfortune not only of libertines who believe not, but of sinners who do believe, and live as though they believe not. And, indeed, what will it avail us to believe, if we lead not a life conformable to our faith? What do I say? if our life is in opposition to our faith? To believe a resurrection that will bring us before the supreme Judge of the living and the dead, and take no pains to gain the favour of this dreadful Judge? To believe a resurrection that will produce us before the eyes of the whole world, and will make us known, such as we are, and live in sinful habits, in vicious practices, now hidden and secret indeed, but which then, revealed and published to the whole universe, will load us with shame, disgrace, and ignominy? To believe a resurrection that must open a way for us to another life, either eternally happy, or eternally miserable, according to the good we shall have done, or the evil we shall have committed, in the present life, and do no good in the present life that may pro-

cure us a happy immortality, and commit all the evil that may draw the most terrible condemnation upon us, and lead us to a miserable eternity? What will it avail us, I repeat it again, to believe in this manner? Or rather, is not to believe in this manner, to be more culpable, and stand convicted by ourselves? It is you, ye women of the world, it behoves to consider seriously this point of your religion, and to profit by it. Little concerned about futurity, you think of nothing but the present. Totally neglectful of your souls, your whole care is about your persons. Alas! you lose them by endeavouring to preserve them. This, you think not of; but this you will think of too late, indeed, when at the sound of the last trumpet, this body shall revive from its own ashes, and you shall hear from the mouth of God himself these formidable words: "As much as she hath been in delicacies, so much torment give ye to her." Apoc. xviii. Although you have idolized it, and used every art of decoration, death hath condemned it to be the food of worms, and the fresh life I have given it, will make it the food of flames, the sensation of which will be grievous and excruciating, in proportion to its pleasures, and to the degree in which you cherish it. "As much as she hath been in delicacies, so much torment give ye to her."

To conclude, beloved hearers: happy the Christian who believes and expects a glorious resurrection, because he puts himself, by the practice of good works, in a condition to deserve it. This is what animated the great St. Paul, what comforted the rising and persecuted church, what, through a course of ages, upheld so many martyrs, so many solitaries, so many recluses and cloistered religious. For, (said they,) we suffer hardships, we mortify our bodies, we deny ourselves the pleasures which the world affords, but it is to good purpose. And, forasmuch, as we are assured, that the soul survives the body, and that at the close of time the body will be reunited to the soul, that they may commence together an immortal life, we have reason to rejoice in the thought, that then we shall be paid by a sovereign felicity, for all we have quitted upon earth, and all the sacrifices we have made to God. This should inspire all those pious souls who hear me, with the same zeal and the same ardour: I say more, this should sanctify every Christian here to whom I address myself. Upon this ground they ought to form their resolutions; it is impossible they should form them upon a better. If, during this solemnity, they have not performed their

duty to God, this ought to induce them to do it sincerely, speedily, and thoroughly. If they have complied with the precept of the church, and by that means have returned into the way of God, and the path of rectitude, this should be a motive to walk in it constantly. For upon this constancy all depends; and in order to rise again in glory, we must, by a holy perseverance, die in grace. But alas! who shall persevere? Permit me, Christians, in concluding, to adhere particularly to this point. Who, I say, shall persevere? Where are those souls to be found faithful to their promises, and unshaken in their resolutions? None, but yourself, O God, can know them, as none but yourself can know the latent springs and workings of man's heart, or the revolutions of futurity, things which are always present to you, but which are equally hidden from us, and into which our weak sight is disqualified to penetrate. Grant us this constancy and perseverance, so necessary to our eternal welfare, and without which, we can hardly hope to enjoy the fruit of our glorious Redeemer's resurrection.

SERMON IV.

ON THE COMING DOWN OF THE HOLY GHOST.

"*They were all filled with the Holy Ghost.*" Acts ii.

This, beloved hearers, is the great mystery which was first accomplished in the apostles, and which will be accomplished in us likewise, if we are, like them, disposed to receive the heavenly gift of the Spirit of God. For, Jesus Christ, by his death, merited it for us, as well as for the apostles, asked it of his Father for us, by asking it for the apostles; and the solemnity we celebrate, is not, like the other festivals of the year, a simple commemoration, but the very mystery of "the coming down of the Holy Ghost." A subsisting mystery in the church of God; a mystery that will subsist as long as there are Christians in a condition to partake of it, and who shall make it their business to renew it in their hearts. Now, beloved Christians, it depends upon us to be in this category, as it is not only true, but an article of faith, that by the sacraments of the new law, we all of us receive the Holy Ghost every day;

and that, in virtue of our Saviour's promises, the same spirit that descended visibly upon the disciples assembled at Jerusalem, descends, still actually and verily upon us; not indeed with the same splendor and prodigies, but with the same effects of conversion and sanctification, when he finds our souls duly prepared, and we lay them open for his reception. It is, therefore, Christians, of infinite importance for you and for me, to understand thoroughly what the spirit is, which our Saviour hath promised us, and whose ineffable mission must work in us the same effect it worked in the apostles. For, wo be to us, if, by our remissness and infidelity, we put an obstacle in his way; and, (to use a remarkable expression of St. Peter,) we contristate the Holy Ghost, and neglect to enter into the dispositions in which we ought to be, in order to participate of his graces.

O thou divine Spirit, thou plentiful source of every excellent grace, and every perfect gift, communicate a ray of that light to me, with which the disciples of Jesus Christ, when thou reposed on them, were penetrated. Grant me one of those tongues of fire which appeared on their heads, when internally enlightened, animated, and strengthened, they began to display the greatness of thy law. Obliged, as I am, to expound to my audience the truths of salvation, I stand in need of, and humbly implore thy blessed assistance.

The world, in the wretched state to which sin hath reduced it, is not a capacity to receive the Holy Ghost. It is the most palpable and dreadful sign which Jesus Christ hath given us of the reprobation of the world; and in pronouncing this curse against it, he gives no other reason for it, than that the world, in the height of its infatuation, knows not the Holy Ghost: "The Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither seeth him nor knoweth him." John xiv. It is incumbent, therefore (concludes St. Chrysostom) on the preachers of the gospel, to make this spirit known to the world. And this is what I take upon me to do, in the present discourse, being to set forth not only the most sublime, but the most edifying and affecting mystery of our religion. When St. Paul, on his arrival at Ephesus, asked the disciples whom he found there, "whether they had received the Holy Ghost since they believed;" (Acts xix.) surprised and confounded at such a question, they ingenuously confesssed, that "they had not so much as heard whether there were any Holy Ghost." Acts. xix. How

many Christians, or more properly, how many worldlings, to their eternal shame, live at this day in the same ignorance, and perhaps, in an ignorance still more criminal? For, it is not sufficient, in order to obtain the blessing of salvation, to know that the Holy Ghost is the third person of the most adorable Trinity; that he is consubstantial with the Father and the Son; that he proceeds eternally from the one and the other: these are articles of belief, which inform us what the Holy Ghost is in himself, and with respect to himself. But further, beloved hearers, it is meet we should know what he is in regard to us, what he should produce in us, for what end he was sent to us, what we ought to do in order to receive him, and by what means we may judge whether we have received him. Now, how many unhappy Christians are there, who, busied only with the things of this life, were never at the pains to learn all this; and, more blameable than the disciples at Ephesus, might at this day make this shameful avowal: "We know not whether there be any Holy Ghost!" How should we have received the Holy Ghost, since we do not so much as know what the Holy Ghost is? Be that as it may, beloved brethren, here is the idea I would give of this matter; an idea taken from the mystery we are celebrating. This Spirit, of which the apostles received the first-fruits and plenitude, was to them, and is proportionably to us, a Spirit of Truth, a Spirit of Holiness, and a Spirit of Fortitude. Mind these three particulars:—

1st. He is a Spirit of Truth, because by replenishing us with his light, he teacheth us all truth.

2ndly. He is a Spirit of Holiness, because by uniting himself with us, he destroys whatever he finds in us not only impure and carnal, but imperfect and earthly, if opposed to holiness.

3rdly. He is a Spirit of Fortitude, because he enables us to do, and undergo every thing, for God, by inspiring us with a supernatural and heavenly virtue, and a courage superior to all difficulties.

These qualities of the Holy Ghost are clearly represented to us by that mysterious and miraculous fire, under the type of which he was given to the apostles. For fire, which of all the elements is the most noble, hath the virtue to enlighten, to purify, and to warm. Now, these are exactly, so far as they regard us, the three properties of the Spirit of God. As a Spirit of Truth, he enlightens our understandings; as a Spirit of Holiness, he purifies our souls;

and as a Spirit of Fortitude, he invigorates our hearts. As a Spirit of Truth, he removes our errors; as a Spirit of Holiness, he withdraws and withholds us from criminal engagements; and as a Spirit of Fortitude, he enables us to get the better of our passions and weaknesses. As a Spirit of Truth, he gives elevation to, and perfects our minds; as as Spirit of Holiness, he makes a reformation in, and changes our hearts; as a Spirit of Fortitude, he awakens, and calls forth all our powers by the zeal he excites in us, when it is his will that we should act for the glory and interest of God. These three effects of his holy presence, God discovers to us on this great day, which effects I shall make the subject of this discourse.

PART I. To teach truth, is a thing that may well accord with man, because it is a thing not beyond his reach. But to teach all truth, without exception, to teach it without distinction, to every kind of person, to be able to teach it all manner of ways, belongs only to God, and is what every mind, save that of God, is utterly incapable of. Accordingly, it is the characteristic the most essential and divine that Jesus Christ, in the gospel, attributes to the Holy Ghost: "When he shall come, he will teach you all truth;" (John xvi.;) and this same characteris tic it is, that seems to me to have appeared most particularly on this solemn day, when this Spirit of Truth descended upon the apostles, and all the disciples assembled together. The arguments for it I am going to adduce, to which I request you give attention.

St. Augustin, weighing these words, "all truth," says, it appertains to God only to teach all truth, and bring us to the belief of it. For there are truths which flesh and blood reveal not; truths, which startle human reason; truths, from which our nature recoils; humiliating, inconvenient, mortifying truths; but which, for that very reason, are salutary and necessary: in a word, truths, which man (to use a scripture phrase) is unable to bear, much more to relish, or take delight in. If, therefore, it so happen, that he be sincerely and efficaciously persuaded of it, it must be the effect of a superior spirit operating in him, and that raises him above himself. Now there is no spirit but that of God endued with this power. The spirit of man (says St. Chrysostom) teaches, and makes appear to man, what satisfies self-love, what flatters vanity, what excites curiosity, what favours inclination; all this is his province. But whereas, that which combats our passions, and stands in direct opposition to all the inclinations of man, cannot come from

man, and is nevertheless truth, it must necessarily be the Spirit of God that teaches it, and makes it appear to us.

In like manner, it is a sure sign of the Spirit of God, to teach the truth to all sorts of persons. The reason is evident: for, persons there are so ill-disposed, whether to comprehend the truth, or submit to it, even when they comprehend it, that none but the God of Truth can make them capable of it. And, indeed, should the man of finest parts and clearest understanding upon earth, undertake to instruct certain persons of slow comprehension and mean capacities, notwithstanding all his knowledge and perspicuity, they would know nothing. Let him use his best endeavours to persuade certain self-sufficient men, notwithstanding all his proofs and demonstrations, they will not believe him. But when the Spirit of God exerts his power over them, neither the stubbornness of these, nor the stupidity of those, is an obstacle to the omnipotent impressions of truth. The reason is, that this Spirit, who is supremely and eminently the Spirit of Truth, by communicating his divine influence to us, surmounts and annihilates all these obstacles. That is, one of the effects of his presence is, to correct and amend all the faults of our mind; and having himself made all our minds, he knows how to give them what cast he pleases. Accordingly, though dull, he makes them ingenious and intelligent; and, though rebels to the truth, he induces them to pay submission to it. Masters of another sort are desirous of teachable pupils, who have in themselves dispositions to hear the truth which is proposed, and in which they are instructed. But the Spirit of God hath no occasion for this choice. Disciples of what kind soever, indocile, heavy, incredulous, perverse, prepossessed, may suit him, (says St. Augustin,) because he hath the power to make them all susceptible of instruction: "It is written in the prophets, They shall be all taught of God." John vi.

To teach truth in a limited manner is the work of man: I mean, to teach it by lessons and rules, and fix it in the mind to a certain degree of persuasion and conviction. Thus it was that the Pagan philosophers impressed gradually on the minds of their hearers the natural truths they dictated to them, using long discourses and many words. But to teach in an instant the most profound and incomprehensible truths of religion; to teach them so as not to cost either labour or study; to teach them, and work such conviction in teaching them, that persons are determined to sacrifice their

lives and fortunes to them, is to teach them like a God, and in such a manner as to vindicate perfectly the efficacy and operation of the Spirit of God. Now this is that, beloved Christians, which was fulfilled, to the letter, in the persons of the apostles, and one of the greatest miracles that ever appeared under heaven; the miracle which hath most of all contributed to the planting of our holy faith, and of which, for that reason, we ought to preserve an eternal remembrance.

For was it not a very astonishing prodigy, to see the apostles, at the moment they received the divine Spirit, as replenished with heavenly knowledge, and consummated in the science of the kingdom of God, as they had till then been ignorant, and subject to gross errors? Was it not a change by the right hand of the Most High, to see them in Jerusalem deliver truths, which they had made profession not only to disbelieve, but to contradict? While they had no Master but Christ our Lord, (O adorable and impenetrable mystery!) you know it would seem as if he were not himself sufficient to make them comprehend the doctrine he came to settle upon earth. Whatever care and pains he had taken, for three whole years, to give them a thorough comprehension of it, every thing that regarded his divine personality was hidden from them. They were disgusted with his humility, they were scandalized at his cross, they entertained no hopes that he would fulfil his promises. Instead of the redemption from sin which they ought to have expected from him, they imagined to themselves a chimerical, that is, a temporal redemption, by the hopes of which they were misguided, and went astray. And when this God-man addressed a discourse to them on the necessity of sufferings, on the advantages of poverty, on the happiness of persecutions, on so great an obligation of forgiving injuries as to love their enemies, the scripture tells us: "They understood nothing of these things, and this saying was hidden from them." Luke xviii. The reason is, that they had not received the Spirit of God, and that none but the Spirit of God can teach all these truths. But the moment they received the divine Spirit, these truths, which had hitherto appeared so contradictory and incredible, are unfolded and laid open before their eyes. They comprehendthe meaning of them, they discover the principles of them, they see the consequences of them. To deny one's self, and carry one's cross, is no longer in their way of thinking a folly, whereas in it they place all their

wisdom. To love one's enemies, and pardon injuries the most atrocious, is no longer in their estimation a weakness, or meanness of spirit, whereas thereby it is that they measure the greatness and force of the Christian spirit. The riches of the earth are by them no longer accounted a good, whereas they deem it a beatitude to be poor and in want of all things. They no longer look upon persecutions as an evil, whereas they are overjoyed to have been worthy of it. I mention nothing but what we read in the book of Acts; and those are the holy and admirable lessons which this divine Master gave the apostles, and to receive which he rendered them capable, when he came down upon them. Now when I say that the divine Spirit rendered them capable of all this, I suppose I shall make you, beloved hearers, conclude with me, that therefore he is a Spirit who teaches all truth. For, what may he not teach and evince, who evinces the necessity of self-denial, self-forgetfulness, and self-hatred?

But what kind of men, think ye, were the apostles before the Holy Ghost came to teach them these truths? Ah! Christians, how wonderful is this! men full of failings; senseless men, according to the reproach of Jesus Christ, "and slow of heart to believe;" (Luke xxiv.;) carnal men, unwilling to judge of the things of God but by the senses, "unless they should see;" (John x.;) self-interested men, who would allow nothing but what was conformable to their desires; men, with whom our Saviour himself could scarce have patience, and to whom he said with an indignant emotion: "O faithless generation, how long shall I bear with you?" Mark xiii. For thus it is that the gospel represents them, and such was their disposition even after the resurrection of the Son of God; whereas Jesus Christ, at his departure from them, and ascending into heaven, reproached them with their incredulity and hardness of heart. Are these a sort of men, capable of receiving instructive lessons in the school of the Holy Ghost, and of being admitted into it? Yes, (says St. Chrysostom,) they are a sort of men, of whom the Holy Ghost makes choice, in order to make them his disciples. Were they better disposed, they would not have been so much to his purpose; were they more refined and rational, he would not draw all the glory he means to draw from their conversion. They must necessarily be men of this sort, to show what he is, and what he can do. Jesus Christ reproaches them, at his departure, with the deplorable situation in which he

leaves them. This is the ground on which the Spirit of Truth thought it proper to display his power. These incredulous men he makes supporters of the faith, and these ignorant men he makes teachers of all nations; to the end there be no one upon the earth, who may not set up for the exalted quality of being disciple to the Holy Ghost, and of whom the Holy Ghost may not be the master. For if he taught the apostles, whom will he not teach?

You ask me to what degree he persuades them, so as to make them resolve to die for the truth he teaches; so as to make them prepare for martyrdom, and inspire them with an ardent desire of it? for, it was to that end that these disciples received such a plenitude of the Holy Spirit. Now, as to what regards persuasion, they received it in the highest degree of plenitude. If Plato (says St. Chrysostom) had had the presumption to require of his followers this testimony of their belief in him, if he would have had them maintain his doctrine to the effusion of their blood, far from adhering to him, they would have despised him, and derided his doctrine, because he persuaded them as a man, and because the persuasion which comes from a man falls infinitely short of that force and efficacy. Make this inference, therefore, and reason in this manner: When the Holy Ghost reveals to our Saviour's disciples the truths of the gospel, he at the same time reveals to them, that a faith in these truths will be an engagement for them of undergoing martyrdom, and that to believe and maintain such truths will subject them to the necessity of being dealt with in a cruel manner, oppressed grievously, and sacrificed like victims. Nethertheless, he persuades them on this condition. A visible sign, and incontestable proof, that it is by the Spirit of God they are influenced.

Think not, however, beloved Christians, that this was never but once accomplished, or that it was never accomplished but in the persons of these first disciples. For, St. Luke assures us, in express terms, that the miracle I speak of was renewed every day in the infant church; that the Holy Ghost descended upon the faithful, sometimes while washed in the waters of regeneration, sometimes while under the imposition of hands, and sometimes while the word of salvation was explained: and that thereby, day by day, "the multitude of believers in the Lord increased." Acts v. Now that which came to pass in those times, and the signs of which St. Luke mentions, comes to pass, notwithstanding the perversity of the age, at this day likewise, although in a manner

not so illustrious. This we have seen, ourselves, and admired, more than once, when libertine worldlings, freethinkers, and unbelievers, who lived among us, and under our eyes, have renounced their impiety, have submitted to the yoke and laws of religion, and have sincerely acknowledged and glorified God. Thus it was that the world became Christian; thus it was that the darkness of infidelity was converted into the pure light of faith; and thus it was that the Spirit of God, according to the Spirit of God himself, "filleth the whole earth." Wisd. v.

But what hath the spirit of darkness done, that enemy to God and the works of God, and jealous of his glory? In order to counteract this miracle, he hath used his endeavours, and even found means to pervert the universe by a spirit quite contrary to the Spirit of Truth, that is, by the spirit of the world; for, it is universally diffused, and hath disfigured the whole face of the earth, which the Spirit of God had revived, and restored to its genuine state. But this, Christians, I must place in a clearer point of view: for, it is a vice of our age that cannot sufficiently be deplored. The whole universe is now-a-days filled with the spirit of the world; and we may say, that the spirit of the world is the ruling spirit which governs every thing. Undoubtedly, it is the spirit of the world that is consulted in business, that reigns in conversation, that makes alliances and societies, that regulates customs. We judge according to the spirit of the world, we speak according to the spirit of the world, we behave according to the spirit of the world. Shall I say it? We would square the service of God, and accommodate our religion, to the spirit of the world: and because this spirit is a lying spirit, an erroneous spirit, a hypocritical spirit, by a necessary consequence, which is but too evident even from experience, it follows from thence, that there is nothing in the world but what is false: false pleasures, false honours, false joys, false promises, false praises; so much concerning external advantanges: false virtues, false prudence, false liberality, false justice, false generosity, false probity; so much concerning the endowments of the mind: but what is infinitely more insufferable, false conversions, false devotions, false humility, false penitence, false zeal for God, false charity toward our neighbour; so much concerning the work of salvation. Hence it is, that men of the world, filled with its spirit, seem to have no other care or study but to deceive others, and themselves too; to conceal what the

are, and make show of what they are not. Hence it is, that the world, according to the apostle's words, is a scene where all is done in figure; where there is nothing solid, substantial, or real; where flattery is in credit; where sincerity is odious; where passion, supported by fraud and artifice, speaks boldly and without restraint; where simple and modest truth is held captive, and lost in silence. A most pernicious spirit, which, proportionably as it gains dominion over the world, extinguishes the most shining lights not only of Christianity and religion, but even of reason.

Nevertheless, I say it again, this spirit of the world is universally adopted, and gains ground on all sides. We are not satisfied with having it ourselves, we communicate it to others, and use our endeavours to make it more and more general. A father fills the heads and hearts of his children with it, and gives them lessons and rules concerning it; he tinctures their childhood with this spirit, he lays down rules of life for them from this spirit, he settles them in the world according to this spirit, and he and they are damned together by this spirit. It is not in the houses of the great only that this spirit of the world exercises a supreme dominion, but in subordinate stations, and among the vulgar, nay, in the church and holy places among the clergy. For I see, (says St. Bernard,) and to my heart-felt sorrow, that all the earnestness and zeal of many of the ministers of the church, consists in prosecuting and making good their right; in being self-sufficient, and elated with their dignity; in enjoying their revenues, and making an ill use of them. Thus spoke he of his own time. Now it is well known (adds he) that it is not the Spirit of God, but of the world, which inspires this mercenary and ambitious zeal. Behold then how the spirit of the world rules in the very sanctuary. You will tell me, that even professed religious are not exempt from it; and that not unfrequently in the profession they make of renouncing the world, they retain the spirit of it. I know it, and shudder when I think of it seriously. But if it be a matter of dread for me, how can it be for you a matter of security. And if this unfortunate spirit of the world can blind and mislead a man sequestered from the world, what have not those to fear, who are exposed, by the necessity of their station, to all the temptations and dangers of the world?

Be that as it may, beloved Christians, let us resume the subject, and by the miracle which the Holy Ghost operated in the apostles,

let us learn what we are in the presence of God. To judge by the effects, hath this Spirit of Truth, whose wonders and prodigies I have just recounted, been hitherto a Spirit of Truth for us? And if he hath not, to what shall we impute it, but to the hardness and depravity of our own hearts? Whatever profession we may make of being, as Christians, the disciples of the Spirit of Truth, are we really persuaded of the truths of Christianity? Hath he made us relish them? Hath he given us a sincere and efficacious disposition to put them in practice? We adore these divine truths in speculation; but do we conform our conduct to them? We speak of them, perhaps, with eloquence and enthusiasm, but are our morals correspondent with our words? We give lessons to others upon that head; but are we ourselves fully convinced of them? Do we believe with a steadfast and lively faith, that, to be Christians, it is our duty not only to carry our cross, but to place our glory in it? That, to follow Jesus Christ, we must internally renounce not only all things, but even ourselves? That to belong to him, not only we must not indulge the flesh, but must crucify it? That, to find grace before God, we must not only forget injuries received, but to return good for evil? Do we firmly, and without hesitation, believe all these points of the evangelic doctrine? And can we bear witness to ourselves, that we believe them as fully and constantly in heart, as we openly confess them in words? The apostles, the moment they received the Holy Ghost, were ready to lay down their lives for the truth; are we ready, I do not say to lay down our lives, but to destroy our irregular desires and passions? According to this rule, is there room to believe, that the Spirit of Truth hath undeceived us with respect to a thousand errors which occasion all the misdeeds in the world? That he hath disabused us of I know not how many maxims which pervert us? That he hath opened our eyes upon certain articles which are so many sources of damnation? If he hath done nothing of all this, what proof have we that we have received him? And if we have not received him, whom have we to blame for it but ourselves?

Perhaps to excuse the criminal infatuation in which we live, we have the boldness to say, that we want the illuminations of the heavenly Spirit, and by that means ascribe to him the iniquity of our errors. But as Spirit of Truth, he hath taken care to remove all grounds for this pretext, and convince us by the reproach

he so often makes us in the inspired writings, that our errors arise solely from our resistance to his divine lights; for he lets us know, that if we are uninformed, it is because we are untractable, and unwilling to hearken to him, and because, regardless of his inspirations, we follow the guileful spirit of the world, which corrupts us, and leads us into perdition: "Stiff-necked, and uncircumcised in heart, ye always resist the Holy Ghost." Acts vii. Ah! let us not, beloved hearers, so far outrage the Spirit of grace, as to endeavour to justify our conduct at the expense of grace itself. Preserve us from so fatal an irregularity, O divine Spirit! and, to that intent, make us know the things you taught the apostles. Grant that at last we may become truly your disciples; and be to us not only a Spirit of Truth, but a Spirit of Holiness: it is the subject of the second part.

Part II. As God is absolutely and supremely holy, because he is essentially and in himself holy; so the Spirit of God, by a personal property, is called in the scripture not only the holy, but the sanctifying Spirit, that is, the source and origin of sanctity in all persons to whom he imparts himself. It was not, therefore, without reason, that the Saviour of the world, on the point of ascending into heaven, and speaking of the Holy Ghost, whom he was to send upon the earth, made use of a very mysterious expression, to all appearance, when he told his disciples, that in his divine Spirit, they would receive a second baptism, and that at the moment his promises should be fulfilled in them, (and they were to be fulfilled in a few days,) they should be baptized in the Holy Ghost: "Ye shall be baptized in the Holy Ghost not many days hence." Acts i. For, the proper effect of baptism is, to purify and sanctify; and the Holy Ghost being come down particularly to purify the hearts of men, how mysterious soever the expression may appear, it was very natural, as our Saviour meant it. But the point is at present to search thoroughly into the meaning of it; and whereas this baptism of the Holy Ghost was promised to the faithful in general, it is your business and mine to scrutinize and find out—its excellence on one hand, and the obligations annexed to it on the other. Two heads of instruction these, the consequence of which I shall lay before you, and which I beseech you to keep in remembrance.

1st. It is, therefore, true, that the coming down of the Holy Ghost upon the apostles, was a kind of baptism, of which they all

felt the salutary impression; and this is what made Tertullian say, that those blessed disciples were overflowed with the Spirit of God. Emphatic words, but in the main literally coincident with our Saviour's promise: "Ye shall be baptized in the Holy Ghost," whereas in the primitive ages of Christianity, they baptized by immersion, which was a kind of overflowing. Now, what is it to be baptized with the Holy Ghost, but to acquire, by receiving him, a celestial and wholly divine purity? I know, Christians, that from their first call to the apostleship, the apostles had been baptized by our blessed Saviour; and I know that in virtue of this first baptism, conferred on them, they were already spotless in the presence of God, according to the testimony of Jesus Christ himself: "Ye are clean." John xix. But you know, moreover, that this first baptism conferred on the apostles, had been the baptism of water; whereas the second, of which the Holy Ghost, by his ineffable mission and immediate presence, was, in a manner quite particular, the baptism of fire. A difference which the holy precursor had declared, when speaking to the Jews of the Messiah, he told them: "Ye shall be baptized in the Holy Ghost and fire." Matt. iii. A difference which was fully and clearly verified, when the "Holy Ghost appeared to them in the form of cloven tongues, as of fire, and sat upon each of them." Acts ii. To what end was this symbolical fire? To show, (according to St. Chysostom,) that as fire hath a virtue infinitely more active, more penetrating, and more purifying than water, so the hearts of men, by the coming of the Holy Ghost, were to be purified in a manner much more perfect than they had been by the first baptism of Jesus Christ. The apostles in reality, after the baptism of Jesus Christ, though sanctified and regenerated by this sacrament, were still subject to great imperfections. According to the account we meet with in the gospel, they were still ambitious, selfish, jealous; there were dissensions among them; and they fell into weaknesses, from which the grace, though sanctifying, of the baptism conferred on them by the Son of God, had not quite preserved them. But no sooner do they receive the divine Spirit, than they become entirely spiritual men, disengaged from the world, and above every worldly consideration; men, not only holy, but of a consummate holiness; men totally absorbed in God and regardless of themselves; in a word, perfect and irreprehensible men. They are no longer (says St. Chrysostom) that rude and unshapen gold, such as we see

digged from the bowels of the earth, but pure, unaloyed gold, tried in the crucible and by fire. Now the fire by which they have been tried is (says St. Paul) our God himself: not an irritated God, that pours down, as heretofore, the fire of his wrath upon the heads of sinners, but the divine Spirit, that bestows with profusion his gifts and graces, and reduces to nothing, by the fire of his love, whatever he finds earthly and impure in his chosen servants: "For, our Lord is a consuming fire." Heb. xii.

Would you know, Christians, to how great a degree of perfection and purity this baptism of fire went? Be not scandalized at what I am going to say, as it is one of the most constant verities of faith. Perhaps you imagine that this baptism ended in the apostles, by taking away from them certain attachments, either to the world or to themselves. It is a great mistake: I have something still more important to declare to you. This is it: the perfection of this baptism arose to the purifying of their hearts from a certain kind of attachment which they had had, and still preserved for our blessed Saviour. Yes, this attachment, too human to the Saviour of the world, was an obstacle in the apostles to the coming down of the Holy Ghost; and, if Jesus Christ had not, in order to break this attachment, separated from them, the Holy Ghost would not have been communicated to them: "If I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you." John xvi. Where was the inconsistency of the one with the other? And why could not the apostles receive the Holy Ghost, while they were attached to their divine Master? Hearken to St. Augustin's answer, and draw yourselves the consequences. Because the apostles, (says this holy doctor,) in attaching themselves to Christ our Lord, did not, as they should have done, look upon him with eyes sufficiently pure, and because they considered him, in the love which they bore him, too much, according to his humanity and the flesh. True it is, that his humanity was holy, and his flesh consecrated by its hypostatical union with the Word. But because the heaviness of their understandings hindered them from sufficiently discerning this mystery, and because, in attaching themselves to Christ our Lord, their ideas of him rose no higher than as of a man, though a God-man, the Spirit of God, whose holiness infinitely surpasses all our ideas of it, could not, in this state of imperfection, honour them with his presence. It was, therefore, necessary (continues St. Augustin) that the apostles should lose sight of our blessed Saviour, in order

to be replenished with the Holy Ghost; and it was necessary that the Holy Ghost should divest and banish from the hearts of the apostles, the too natural, or human affection, they entertained for their Lord and Master, for it should be a supernatural affection. Such, I say, beloved hearers, was the excellence of the baptism of fire in the apostles; and from thence we should infer, what are its obligations with regard to us: I mean, how far the Spirit of God should be to us a spirit of purity and holiness.

And now it is surprising, that from the beginning of the world, Almighty God protested by an oath, so solemn and so express, that, "his Spirit should not abide in man, for that he was flesh." Gen. vi. Is it surprising, that in the extreme horror he conceived of the corruption of man, he should repent his having created him, should deprive him of his Spirit, and should make him feel the effects of his justice, by the universal deluge, which, as I may say, authentically expiated the abominations of the flesh? No, no, Christians, there is nothing that surprises me in all this; and, admitting the principle I have just laid down, God, according to the ordinary laws of his wisdom, could not do otherwise. What surprises me is, that people flatter themselves they may, without losing the favour of God, keep up in the world certain attachments, fatal attachments, the inexhaustible source of all the misfortunes, all the misdeeds, all the extravagancies, all the excesses and passions of men. People entertain them, pretending that they are innocent; and being authorised, as they suppose, by the custom of the world, they see nothing in them incompatible with the spirit of holiness. For this, ye worldlings, is the judgment you give of them; and this, perhaps, is the most dangerous illusion you have to guard against. But use what endeavours you will to deceive yourselves, and to find excuses, this Spirit of God, whose penetration is infinitely above all your artifices, either will never take up his abode in you, or will destroy in you all those hellish attachments which tie you to creatures, and which your self-love would fain justify. If you were in good earnest, and fully determined (instead of believing the spirit of the world, that spirit of seduction) to be influenced and guided by the Spirit of holiness, a spirit of which you ought, as Christians, to be the living temples, by the sight he would afford you of yourselves, and the remorses he would stir up in your hearts, he would make you comprehend the absolute impossibility there is of reconciling *him*, who is purity and sanctity itself

with these attachments; especially those which diversity of sexes, joined to the vivacity of age and constitution, have rendered at all times so dangerous and so pernicious. As a Spirit of Holiness, he would convince you, that these attachments neither are, nor can be, innocent for you, since you find, in spite of you, that they soften your hearts; since you cannot deny that they make them susceptible of stronger sensations; since you have learned, by experience, that they excite in them amorous passions; since you know they withhold you from, and even disgust you with, your lawful occupations; since from the moment they become attachments, and attachments of the heart, known for such, the world itself, however indulgent, will not pardon them; since they expose you to its censures, give room for detraction, and serve for a subject of satirical merriment; since they are, at least, the most immediate cause of sin; I say more, since they are, for the most part, nothing but a disguise and a refinement of sensuality.

This is what the Spirit of God would let you see and understand, if you hearkened to him, and were more tractable in following his secret impulse and operations. But whether you hearken to him or not, independently of you, it is decreed in heaven, that God will withdraw his Spirit from the man who lives after the flesh. Now is it not true, that these attachments take their rise in the lusts of the flesh? I know you call them by honourable names, and, to stifle the remorses they might occasion, would, without scruple, make them pass in the world under the denomination of becoming friendships. But the Spirit of Holiness, in the bottom of your hearts, protests against this supposed decency, and lets you understand that these friendships are condemned by God, which by an imperceptible, but infallible progression, lead from that which is seemingly decent, to that which is actually impure and criminal. How then, Christians? The apostles could not receive the Holy Ghost, while they retained for Christ Jesus an attachment too human; and you suppose yourselves disposed to receive him, though you suffer the most lively and ardent passions for mortal creatures to take root in your hearts; though you indulge such tender sentiments for them, that by an immutable consequence your hearts ever after are affected with aridities in respect to God; though you form, and keep up connexions with them, the privacy of which would pervert an angel, had he senses capable of being affected; though you tamper with them in business and

intrigues, which, to your shame, make the chief occupation of your lives. No, no, (ought to conclude the worthy Christian,) no, divine Spirit, I confess that nothing of all this can subsist with you; and there would be even a monstrous contradiction in the concurrence which I would form, or which I might think myself capable of forming of these things, with purity of manners, and still more so with purity of heart. Though all this should not go so far as to destroy the influence of your Spirit in me by a grevious offence, and though such an attachment should not absolutely break the link of habitual grace, which unites me with you, yet the respect alone for your adorable person, oh, Spirit of my God! the idea alone which faith gives me of your delicacy, concerning the infinite preference which is due to you, and concerning the supreme and undivided love, which, as God, you require; the fear alone of exciting your anger, and provoking your jealousy, (for you are a jealous God,) should induce me to bid farewell to every created object. Though it were my eye, I ought to pull it out, since it would be a cause of scandal for me, and an obstacle to your graces, and to the participation of your favours.

2ndly. Now this, beloved hearers, is what I called, so far as it relates to us, the obligations of the internal baptism of the Holy Ghost. What then ought we to do, in order to fulfil these important obligations? And to what should this mysterious baptism be reduced in practice? This is it: in order to correspond with the designs of God, our whole and constant care should be, to correct and retrench whatever is human in our thoughts, in our desires, in our words, in our actions. For, (as St. Paul told the Philippians, after they had received the Spirit of God,) neither our actions, nor our words, nor our desires, nor our thoughts, should have henceforward for end, or rule, or object, anything but what is good, what is laudable, what is instructive, exemplary, and edifying: "Whatever is chaste, whatever is holy, whatever is of good report." Philip. iv. Our only and continual care must be, "to mortify by the Spirit, the deeds of the flesh." Rom. viii. Now, by the deeds of the flesh, the apostle understood not only those execrable, beastly vices, those monsters of sin, which he forbid so much as to be mentioned among us, but a hundred other things which lead to them, and which, through the frailty of human nature, are dispositions to them; opportunities sought after, licentious discourses, imprudent liberties, immodest looks, curiosity,

reading, conversations, diversities unbecoming the Christian profession, too free a use of the bottle and dainties, a soft, sensual, effeminate life. He understood, ye daughters of the age, those worldly and affected airs, so contrary to modesty, and the decorum peculiar to your sex; those artful nudities, sometimes so shameful and so scandalous; that luxury, the parent of pride and haughtiness; that display of vanity; that idolizing of your persons; that immoderate desire of pleasing, and passing for agreeable, which the corrupt spirit of the world makes light of, but which, doubtless, the Holy Ghost, if you have received him on this festival, makes you see the danger, and even the crime. To say nothing of unchastity, by the works of the flesh, St. Paul understood, in general, whatever is incompatible with the holiness of the Spirit of God, especially charity: "The works of the flesh are manifest, which are, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife." Gal. v. For if you have not, my brethren, (says he, and may I be allowed to say the same thing after him?) if you have not corrected all these vices; if you still entertain a rankling and bitterness against your neighbour; if you are not sincerely reconciled with your enemy; if you do not stifle every vindictive inclination in your hearts; if friendship is not restored by a sincere and cordial charity, (whatever opinion you may have of the matter, or of yourselves,) "are ye not carnal?" 1 Cor. iii. Now, so long as you are carnal, you cannot entertain a thought of receiving the Spirit of God.

I am mistaken, Christians; you may entertain the thought, nay, you ought to entertain it. For how great sinners soever you may be, God Almighty hath made you a promise of him; and his oath, that his Spirit shall not be in man, so long as man shall be a slave of the flesh, is no let or obstruction to the truth of that other oracle, whereby he declares, that "he will pour out of his Spirit upon all flesh." Acts ii. And this is a great consolation to weak and imperfect souls. The Spirit of God will not abide in us, so long as we are carnal; but he will come upon us, that we may cease to be carnal, and this is the miracle we must beg of him. A greater miracle than the creation of the world; or rather, a miracle which, in the order of grace, is a kind of creation more miraculous than that of the world. But for this, O Lord, the omnipotence of your holy grace is requisite. When you created the world, you exerted your operation upon a nonentity, and this nonentity made no resistance. Here you operate upon the nonentity of sin, which,

nonentity as it is, rises in opposition to you, and makes head against you. Send us, therefore, your Spirit in all force and plenitude, and thereby, O Lord, create in us pure hearts, chaste hearts, hearts submissive to your holy law: "Send forth thy Spirit, and they shall be created, and thou shalt renew the face of the earth." Ps. l. What strength, my God, what zeal for your glory will he not inspire! It is what I shall enlarge upon in the third and last part.

PART. III. To possess in himself the divine essence, without being able to communicate it to any other divine person; to be produced by the Father and by the Son, without being the principle of any other similar production; in a word, to be steril, God as he is, in the adorable Trinity, because he is the term of the Trinity itself, is a characteristic that suits the Holy Ghost only, and that distinguishes him essentially as Holy Ghost. A sterility, (say the schoolmen,) which, far from being defective, denotes, and supposes in him a plenitude of all divine perfections. But, as faith shows us, that the Holy Ghost is steril in himself, and with respect to the two other divine persons from which he proceeds; so it gives us to understand, that he is active, fruitful, and full of efficacy and virtue, externally, and in the persons to whom he imparts his heavenly gifts. For, according to the scripture, the Holy Ghost is the immediate and substantial principle of the operations of grace. It is by the Holy Ghost, that we are cleansed and regenerated in the sacrament of baptism: "Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost." John iii. It is by the Holy Ghost, that we are reconciled to God in the sacrament of penance: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whose sins ye shall forgive they are forgiven." John xx. It is by the Holy Ghost that we pray, or rather, it is the Holy Ghost that prays in us: "For, the Spirit himself maketh intercession for us with unutterable groanings." Rom. viii. It is by the Holy Ghost that the gift of charity is diffused in our hearts; and as in quality of Holy Ghost, he is himself the subsisting charity by which the Father and the Son love one another by a mutual and eternal love; so (say the fathers) he is the radical charity in the bottom of our hearts, by which we love God, and from which proceed all the holy desires we form of God: "The charity of God is spread abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost who is given us." Rom v. Now if ever this property of the Spirit of God was plainly revealed to

us, it is in the mystery we this day celebrate, in which we see men, (I mean the apostles,) heretofore weak and timid, fired all at once, by the virtue of this divine Spirit, with a fervent zeal; a zeal that made them instantly speak, and openly declare themselves; a zeal that determined them to undertake everything; a zeal that enabled them to undergo everything for the name and glory of Jesus Christ. Three dispositions, which the Holy Ghost, by his presence, operates in them, and which evidently show, that he is supremely and evidently the Spirit of might, or to speak more properly, might itself. I crave your attention a moment longer, and I shall conclude.

1st. Scarce are the apostles "filled with the Holy Ghost, but they begin to speak," (Acts ii.) and to declare themselves. This is the first effect of their zeal. But for whom do they declare, and to whom do they speak? For Jesus Christ, whose ambassadors, whose heralds, whose witnesses they look upon themselves to be henceforward. Ashamed to have been, till that time, afraid to render him the testimony they owed him; confounded not to have had the courage to take his cause in hand, and support his interests; provoked at themselves for having dishonoured him by a defection and a flight full of weakness, and resolved to repair the scandal given, by the fervour of their confession, and at the expense of their lives, what do they do? Animated with the Spirit that hath newly come down on them, and given them strength, they break forth from the room in which they lay concealed; they appear in public places, enter into the synagogues, and show themselves openly in courts of justice; and there, superior to all worldly interests, they protest that this man, crucified, and placed, through the injustice of Pilate, in the rank of criminals, is the Messiah; that this Jesus of Nazareth is the Lord's anointed, and that God hath glorified him by prodigies that surpass all the power of man; that this Just One, delivered up to death, is the Author of Life, and that he made it evidently appear by raising himself from the dead; that they are ocular and irreproachable witnesses of it, and that they can no longer resist the force of the divine Spirit, who hath made himself master of their hearts, and who speaks by their mouths. Every endeavour to impose silence on them was to no purpose. God commands us (replied they) to publish what we have seen, and what we have heard; and it is fit we should rather obey God than men. To no purpose are pains

taken to make them pass for madmen, and persons in drink. If (says St. Peter) it is drunkenness to fulfil the oracles of the prophets, think of us as you please; but do you know what Joel hath foretold? That Almighty God, in these latter times, would shed abroad his Spirit upon all flesh. Now this we verify by confessing Jesus Christ; and, far from blushing at this drunkenness, we place our glory in it. Who express themselves, beloved Christians, in this manner? Is it men full of zeal? No, (says St. Chrysostom,) it is zeal itself; it is the heavenly Spirit that makes use of men, as organs, to make known the Redeemer of men, to establish the faith and divinity of Jesus Christ, to confirm his miracles, to authorise his doctrine, to plant his church and the religion he brought into the world. For, it is the Spirit (says the blessed Saviour) "that shall glorify me." John xvi. And he tells his disciples: "It is not ye that shall speak" for me; your bare testimony, though true, would not have sufficient weight: "It is the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you." Matt. x.

2ndly. The Holy Ghost not only makes the apostles speak as becomes apostles, but by the greatest miracle that ever was wrought, makes them undertake and execute things, so far above human ability, that it cannot be denied but it is the finger of God that acts. Hearken to this. These are poor fishermen, destitute of talents, credit and reputation; men looked upon as the "off-scouring of the world;" but who, possessed by this Spirit, propose to make a change in, and reform the world. What have they in order to carry their design into execution? What treasures are they possessed of? By what counsel are they influenced? What arms have they on? No other, O my God, than the virtue of your Spirit, by which they surmount every obstacle. This they do, beloved Christians, neither by the evidence of the mysteries they declare, as such mysteries are incomprehensible; nor by indulgence and abatement of rigour in the doctrine they preach, as such doctrine wars against the senses; nor by the charms and artifices of a studied eloquence, in that their humble profession had been their sole study. Nevertheless, all submits to them, or rather yields to the law they promulgate, learned and unlearned, the most refined people and the most barbarous nations, kings and subjects, the great and the vulgar. This new law extends by their ministry beyond the seas; penetrates into places the most inaccessible; is established in provinces, in kingdoms, in empires;

neither did ever the renowned conquerors, of whom profane history boasts so much, whose heroic actions it hath so much extolled, whose names it meant to immortalize by such magnificent encomiums, with all their power, preparatives, and armies, push their conquests, I do not say farther, but even so far.

The apostles had many persecutions and contradictions to undergo; but by a most extraordinary exertion of the power of the Holy Ghost, they are proof against all that. They despise torment and death; they hug their chains; they rejoice in their crosses; their delight is to suffer and die for Christ Jesus. Here let us stop: a detail of particulars were an endless undertaking. These, beloved hearers, these are the excellent, the divine operations of the Spirit of God, not only in the first disciples of our Saviour, but in all righteous souls: and by these we shall learn, whether we be animated by this Spirit, and whether he hath given us the fortitude with which the apostles were all at once endued.

3rdly. For, to reduce all this to something practical, to believe that we have received the Spirit of God, and not dare to declare ourselves openly for God; to be silent when we should speak; to be idle when we should act; to fear running a risk, and exposing our persons to danger, when we ought to sacrifice ourselves; to believe that we have received the Spirit of God, and do nothing for God, be sluggish and listless in the service of God, and undertake nothing for the glory of God; to believe that we have received the Spirit of God, and never take up a resolution to undergo anything for God; to find whatever we do for God hard and impossible; to wish never to mortify ourselves for God, never to conquer ourselves for God, never to controul ourselves for God, would be a gross error. Let us not suffer, beloved Christians, so great an infatuation to seize our minds. The Holy Ghost is essentially fervour and love. Because love, (says St. Gregory,) wherever it is, doth great things; and if it doth nothng it is not love. Let us practice, therefore, as much as becomes us, whatever the apostles put in practice. If we have received the gift of God and the Holy Ghost, like them, let us speak like them, and act like them; and let us, when Providence shall so ordain it, be in a disposition to suffer like them. Like true disciples of our Lord and Saviour, and filled with his Spirit, let us openly and resolutely confess his name; let us not be ashamed of the gospel; let us bear him testimonies, before mankind, worthy

of our faith; let us show the world what we are, on proper occasions. Let us not, when the cause of God is in question, show an unbecoming complaisance for men; let us not give such an advantage to impiety, as shall enable her to render us timid and silent, but let us confound her by a holy, though modest, liberty. We shall be charged with imprudence; but the same charge, and much more injurious, was laid to the apostles; and yet the fire of their zeal was not at all abated. Let us not think it enough to speak; let us labour for the cause of God with courage, and let us take part in every thing that regards his worship, his religion, his law, his church. According to our ability, and in proportion to our talents, let us lay plans, and resolve on undertakings; let us not be disheartened at the greatness of the objects we shall have to surmount. The Spirit of God will afford us strength to overcome the world. Contradictions we must bear, conflicts we must go through; perhaps it may cost us some persecutions: well, and all this will afford us, like the apostles, consolation and merit. By what will it appear that we have received the Holy Ghost, if not by the constancy with which we shall undergo these kinds of trials?

St. Luke informs us, "that while St. Peter spake, the Holy Ghost fell on all those who heard the word." Acts x. I would, beloved hearers, it were in my power to procure the same miracle for you and for myself! Grant, O Lord, what I say be not a mere wish. Give a blessing to my words, or rather to your own. Pour down upon this whole congregation the fulness of your Spirit. And you, O Spirit of my God, fountain of all graces, author of all holiness, come, enlighten and strengthen us. Come, sanctify this house, which is devoted to you, and which would not be governed but by you, because any other spirit but you, would not keep up the regularity, harmony, and perfect charity, which have always maintained the peace of God in it.

SERMON V.

ON THE WORD OF GOD.

"*He that is of God, heareth the words of God.*" JOHN viii.

THERE is nothing more forcible, or more efficacious, than the word of God. I mean not only the Word which is conceived in God himself, and by which he internally speaks to himself, the increated Word; but that moreover which he externally produces, and by which he reveals his will to his creatures, whether by addressing them without intervention, or by employing, to that purpose, men who are the organs and interpreters of it. This word it is, which the inspired author of the Book of Wisdom denominates "omnipotent." Wisd. viii. And, indeed, if we consider the great things it hath done, whether in the order of nature or of grace, we shall easily discover, that no characteristic is more suitable to it, than that of omnipotence. This word it was, according to the scripture, that by its supreme power, drew all things out of nothing, fixed the pillars of heaven on a solid base, and bestowed upon the earth its stability and fruitfulness. This word it is, according to the tenor of St. Paul's expression, which calls forth the things that, have no being, and that never had a being, as though they existed; which, by raising the dead, will one day make the things that are now no more, sensible of its virtue; and which will make them take, as long as they subsist, whatever movement it will please the great God their Creator to give them. Insomuch, (says St. Augustin,) that there is not one of them, which will not, by some extraordinary prodigy, pay homage to this adorable Word.

Scarce had it fallen from the mouth of Joshua, but the sun stopped its course. The waters were stilled, so soon as it was uttered by the Jewish leader. As Elias used it, the heavens opened and shut. The moment Christ spoke, the tempest was calmed, and the billows ceased to roar. Such is the power of the word of God in the order of nature. But this, I affirm, is nothing in comparison with the wonders it hath wrought in the order of

grace. For, it was this same word which converted the world, which triumphed over idolatry, which subdued vice, and crushed impiety, which brought to the ground the cedars of Lebanon, and beat down the pride of the powers of the earth: "The voice of the Lord breaketh the cedars." Ps. xxviii. Was it not this word, which, preached by the twelve fishermen, was heard with admiration all over the universe? which, without art, or aid of human eloquence, persuaded philosophers, embarrassed libertines, convinced atheists? In a word, which, by mere dint of truth, (to adopt an expression of the apostle St. James,) begot thousands of thousands of Christians to Jesus Christ? "Of his will hath he begotten us by the word of truth." James i.

How comes it then, (St. Chrysostom asks,) that this word, in itself so fruitful and divine, should be so feeble and ineffectual, as it is in this day, in the Christian world? How comes it, that the sacred function of preaching, which, according to the natural course of Providence, should produce good fruit, and in great abundance, by a woful fatality, to our no small shame, is become, it seems, one of the most unserviceable employments? Nay, more, how comes it, that the Word of the Lord, far from being salutary in our regard, hath every day an effect diametrically opposite; and that instead of being the principal cause of our conversion, it should, by a tremendous judgment of God, become the origin of our condemnation? This is the point which I purpose to discuss in the present discourse. I mean to lay open the spring from which flows so pernicious an evil, and by so doing, enable you to apply the necessary remedies.

O thou, Holy Spirit, whose sacred word I undertake to vindicate, illuminate my mind with a heavenly ray, by the light of which I may penetrate into the hearts of my hearers, and deeply engrave in them the sublime doctrines which this great subject engages me to treat.

It is certain, Christians, that the word of God was never more frequently preached in Christendom, than it is in our days; but it is equally true, that this good seed, which is sown in the church, was never more steril, and that Christians never drew from it less fruit. There are in these times no preachers of the gospel, who might not put up their complaints to God, and bespeak him with Isaias: "Lord, who hath believed our report?" Isaiah liii. It is your word which we have preached;

we have appeared as your ambassadors among mankind; we have been received, nay, received in an honourable manner; but did any of them believe us? After having wasted our spirits in endeavours to implant in their minds eternal truths, what was the success? Sometimes, indeed, we have been able to disturb men's consciences, and to stir up in their hearts the fear of your judgments. But what alteration have we seen in their morals? And by what have we been able to discern the effect of your holy word.

This, beloved hearers, struck the prophets of old, and strikes me now with wonder and astonishment. I ask, whence arises, and to what must be attributed, this fruitless labour of apostolical men? Is it to the word itself? To those who preach it? To the Christians who hear it? For it must necessarily proceed from one of these three. Now it would be the highest injustice to arraign the word itself; for it is not, at this day, less powerful than it was in the days of the apostles. To say that it was altered in process of time, would be falling into the error of modern heretics. The church (says Cassiodorus) hath preserved all along, and will to the end of ages preserve, the word of God as pure as her faith. We preach the same gospel St. Peter preached, when by one discourse he converted to the faith three thousand hearers; and when the Holy Ghost descended visibly on such of the faithful who heard the word of God, (as St. Luke relates it,) it was none other than that which we every day impart to you, and which you hear in our churches. How then! Is this inordination to be ascribed to the preachers? I own, Christians, that all dispense it not with the same dispositions, nor with the same edification. I own, with the apostle, that some among them have held it captive; that they still turn it to a mercenary purpose; and that, by a simoniacal kind of traffic, they barter it for I know not what credit and empty reputation in the world. I own that even some of them have brought dishonour and scandal on the sacred ministry, by the irregularity of their manners, not unlike the Pharisees, who were strict in teaching, but wanting in practice: "They say, and do not."

But, after all, it is neither to the merit, nor to the holiness of those who expound it, that the efficacy of the word of God is annexed. It operates by its own intrinsic virtue. And even this advantage it hath over the sacraments, that it doth not depend upon the intention of its ministers. If they profane it, they are

perverted; and we may say that of it which St. Augustin said of baptism conferred by schismatical hands: "It is hurtful to those who give it ill, but profitable to those who receive it well. Therefore, my brethren, if the word of God fructifies so little among you, you cannot ascribe the fault but to yourselves. And to come more close to the subject in hand, I find in most Christians three usual obstacles to the receiving of benefit from the preaching of the gospel; namely, disgust of the word of God, abuse of the word of God, and voluntary resistance to the word of God; and these three obstacles I propose to remove, or at least to encounter, in this discourse: Disgust of the word of God, which is particucularly observable in slothful souls: Abuse of the word of God, which is commonly applicable to the vain and self-sufficient: Resistance to the word of God, with which sinners are always chargeable. Now, according to the order and division of these obstacles, I advance the three following propositions, which include a store of instruction and morality:

1st. I say, that Disgust of the word of God is one of the greatest and most terrible punishments to be apprehended by a Christian.

2ndly. I say, that Abuse of the word of God is one of the most impious and fatal irregularities which can be committed by a Christian.

3rdly. I say, that Resistance to the word of God is one of the most immediate dispositions to obduracy and reprobation in a Christian.

The first hear it, not because it disgusts them. The second hear it, but not as the word of God, and in this they abuse it. The last hear it, and hear it, too, as the word of God, but will not practise it, and in this manner we say they resist it. Hence, with Christ Jesus, I would infer by a quite contrary rule, that "Blessed are they who hear the word of God, and keep it." Luke ii. To be brief; disgust of the word of God, opposed to the beatitude of those who hear it: "Blessed are they who hear." Abuse of the word of God, opposed to the happiness of those who hear it as the word of God: "Blessed are those who hear the word of God." Resistance to the word of God, opposed to the merit and advantage of those who hear it as the word of God, and practise it: "Blessed are they who hear the word of God, and keep it." This shall be the subject of the present discourse.

PART I. I have told you, Christians, and it is true to say, that it was the word of God by which it pleased God to sanctify the world. This was the means, this the instrument which God made use of for the conversion of souls. Others he might have used; but in the ordinary, and even natural course of his wisdom, he confined himself, in some sort, to this alone, And, indeed, the apostle tells us, that "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." Rom. x. Now what the apostle then saith of faith, with regard to infidels, I may of penance with regard to sinners, and of perseverance with regard to the righteous: we are not converted, we change not life, unless we are affected with eternal truths, and these truths are the word of God. A word, which, published, and legally announced by the true ministers of the gospel, strikes our ears first, and forthwith penetrates to the bottom of our hearts, and gives motion to every the most hidden spring. A word (as St. Augustin judiciously remarks) which puts us in a right disposition to receive, and serves as a fit vehicle to convey, all the internal graces which God bestows upon us. A word, which he obliges us to distribute as one of his most precious gifts, and which, by a kind of concatenation, draws all those other gifts along with it, to which the predestination of man is annexed. Is not this the manner in which the Almighty hath always proceeded? And shall we find, by consulting the oracles of scripture, or rather the experience of all ages, that men have ever risen from the darkness of sin to the light of grace, by any other way than by the word which they had heard? Whence I conclude, that one of the greatest and most lamentable misfortunes, which a Christian hath to dread; or, in other words, that one of the most visible punishments of God, which a Christian ought to guard against, is the falling into a disgust of this holy word. For, what a misfortune is it for a Christian to conceive a disgust of that which should convert him, of that which should save him, of that which should inspire him with a love of his duty, of that which should heal the infirmities of his corrupt nature, of that which should reform his erroneous practices, of that which should inspirit him in case he be lukewarm, of that which should enlighten him in case he be blind, of that which should support him in case he be living, of that which should raise him in case he be dead? And are not these the effects of the word of God?

This, beloved hearers, would be sufficient to make good my first proposition. But as you expect that I should give you a more full

and perfect knowledge of it, lend all your attention to what I am going to say. I examine not at present from what sources so great and so pernicious errors may flow in the Christian world. Were I disposed to enlarge upon that topic, I might easily show you, that in some it proceeds from a secret pride, in others from libertinism: in some from attachment to sensual pleasures, in others from a lust of temporal gain. For (says St. Chrysostom) how is it possible, that the word of God, which earnestly recommends humility, austerity, and evangelical poverty, should coincide with ambition, sensuality, and avarice? How is it possible to relish the thing which lays before us incessantly an obligation of hating and shunning the world, while our heads and hearts are taken up with a love of it? Of this, I say, I might make you sensible, and by this you would see, that a disgust of the word is of the same nature with those very things, which, according to the fathers, are at once both sin and the punishment of sin: that is, things, for which God punisheth us, and by which he punisheth us. A reflection thus, which at least would confound our want of faith, when on this head we pretend to plead ignorance, and throw the fault on God; whereas all the principles, from which this disgust of the word springs, so far as they concern us, are voluntary, and therefore are so many causes of condemnation. Without, however, attempting to fathom them, suffice it to see their unhappy consequences. Now both are equally motives of fear, as they are the most rigorous and fatal chastisements which God inflicts, when the sinner is doomed, even before he reaches the brink of eternity, to undergo eternally the weight of his justice.

1st. Do you know, Christians, (this is deserving of all your attention, and will discover to you, by a very plain and obvious figure, an important point, relating to the predestination and reprobation of man,) do you know by what means the anger of the Almighty was kindled against the Israelites, and how that obstinate and rebellious people began to perceive that they had exasperated the Lord? It was by the disgust, according to the scripture, they conceived of the manna. It fell from heaven, and was the food which Almighty God provided them in the wilderness, and which he took care, himself, to afford them, every day, in proportion to their wants; a nourishment, which preserved them in perfect health; insomuch, says the text, that "there was not one feeble among their tribes;" (Ps. civ.;) a nourishment, which,

however plain and simple, had, nevertheless, the rarest and most exquisite qualities; which was wonderfully adapted to all palates; and which, without preparation, had all the effects of the nicest dainties. But what came to pass? Scarce do they refuse submission to God, and oblige him thereby to withdraw himself from them, but they take a disrelish to this food: though the same in reality, it begins no longer to give the same delight; they gather it with aversion, and find it in use unsavoury and insipid. Astonished at this change, what say they to each other? "Our soul loatheth this light bread." Numb. xxi. Prodigious! This heavenly manna, heretofore so delicious, is now insupportable. The appetite flags; they loathe at it, and pant for grosser repasts; and the scripture adds, that at the same time the wrath of God came upon them. Indeed, it should seem, that depravation of taste (as Origen and St. Jerom ingeniously remark) was the first effect of the Lord's vengeance. Now all this, the apostle tells us, was no more than the shadow of that which in after times was to be fulfilled in us. For, beloved hearers, this every day happens to, I know not, how many Christians of the age; and may heaven grant, that you be not taught it by woful experience! The word of God (according to St. Augustin) is the true manna; that is, the spiritual nourishment which God hath prepared for us, and which, according to the views of his Providence, should have on our souls the same effect that the manna in the wilderness had on bodies. And, indeed, when heretofore our lives were regular, and we took no step but in the way of the Lord, this word supported us, comforted us, and bore proportion to our wants and our taste. We heard it with pleasure, and received it with eagerness; we were sensible of its secret and miraculous virtue. But now that our want of fidelity and morals hath obliged Almighty God to turn against us, we experience nothing of all that. This divine word affects no longer our passions, or our reason. Nothing remains but a sad disgust, which makes us cry out with the Jewish people: "Our soul loatheth this light food." Hence we neglect it, we refuse to hear it, we prefer to this duty the most trifling amusements. Hence, if occasionally we are present at it, whether for the sake of decency and form, or induced by example, we are no way advantaged by it. The reason is, that to thrive by food, we must like it, and relish it; and that which may be said of corporeal nourishment, may be said more properly of spiritual aliment.

Accordingly, God himself declares, that "He hath filled the hungry soul with good things." Ps. cvi. So that proportionably as we conceive a holy desire of this word within us, this word will penetrate into the recesses of our heart, with that plenitude of graces which immediately follows it: as, on the contrary, he threatens to dismiss those disdainful souls, who know not the value of so precious a gift, and to deprive them of all the advantages annexed to it: "He hath filled the hungry soul with good things, and the rich he hath sent away empty." Another text hath it: "The disdainful he hath sent away empty."

2ndly. For this reason, innumerable worldlings hear the word of God with extreme indifference, carrying not one thought of heaven away with them, or of what might incline them to seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness. They are present at sermons the most affecting, without being moved, oftentimes disgusted with things which pierce the hearts of others, evidently showing by their insensibility, that they are "the disdainful whom God hath sent away empty."

But you will tell me: this disgust, for which you condemn us, and with which you reproach us, is not a disgust, in strict propriety, of the word of God, but of the word of God not well delivered; for were I to meet with judicious men, animated like the prophets, with the Spirit of God, and capable to represent, with force and dignity, the obligations of my state; preachers, such as St. Paul wished for, who to zeal of souls should join knowledge and experience, and by enlightening the mind, should move the heart, I should hear them with pleasure. Thus the lukewarm and slothful Christian would vindicate his conduct, by blaming divine Providence, and thus he pronounces judgment against himself. For, supposing it true, beloved Christians, that there were no evangelical men remaining, capable of giving emotion to the heart, and instruction to the head, what more palpable sign would you have of the wrath of God? Would it not be to fulfil his threat to the people? I will take away from them the preachers of my word; and they who shall continue to bear that name, and perform that office, shall be empty men, as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. Thus (says the Lord) will I work their wo; thus will I punish them. I will raise no prophets to let them know my will; no one shall possess the divine gift of touching their hearts: "They shall be without a teacher, and

without the law." Paral. xv. Would not, I say, the very thoughts of this malediction afflict you sensibly? and, seized with a salutary fear of perdition, to whom but to yourselves could you impute this melancholy dearth of preachers?

But however the world be plunged in iniquity, we are not, as yet, come to that pass. Thanks be to God, there are still in the church, men of zeal and learning, successors and imitators of St. John the baptist, who, like bright shining beacons, discover the truth, and preach it holily, forcibly, and profitably. But you would have them preach politely and agreeably, and no more; I say politely, according to your notions, and agreeably, according to your taste and inclination; and as those whom you hear, how zealous soever they may otherwise be, are not endowed with the gift of pleasing you, you think it a sufficient handle to absent yourself. Now in this consists your spiritual infirmity, and the punishment of God; I mean, that there are not preachers perfect enough to satisfy your taste and inclination, and correspond with your delicacy. It is thus that God begins your reprobation. For, reprobation is as much fulfilled in your regard, when there are no preachers whom you hear with satisfaction, as if there were absolutely none remaining to instruct you in your duty; and perchance it had been better for you, that absolutely there were none, than that you should meet with none who gain your attention and estimation.

A deplorable situation, and but too common among men of the world, particularly those who attend the court. The word of God palls, because no one is capable to give it that zest which their palates require. If they reasoned right, they would infer that God was exasperated against them; that a principle of religion still remained in them, either vitiated or neglected; that the refinement of taste, on which they plume themselves, is (to hazard the expression) one of the most certain indications of the evil temperature of their faith; and therefore, that they cannot, without the greatest care, ward off the destruction of their souls. For God, how all-wise and good soever, will make no providential laws for them, but those which he hath fixed. Now he hath sanctified the world by the preaching of the gospel; neither is it credible that he will convert them by any other means.

I am certain, however, that the treasure of his graces is not

exhausted; and that he might, to save them, employ prodigies and miracles instead of his word. But let them weigh the case in the scale of equity, and they will find that to expect miracles of God, and to reject his word, is criminal presumption. What crowns their misfortune is, that they comprehend nothing of this, are highly delighted with their mental blindness, and entirely actuated by worldly considerations; as if the scarcity of preachers (such as they would have them) only proved the delicacy and justness of their taste; as if Almighty God would not show the absurdity of this false delicacy, and false justness of their taste, by permitting them to serve as an obstacle to an infinite number of graces, to which their eternal salvation was annexed, and which depend on the docility of an humble mind.

I do not say by what injustice, or rather by what unaccountable means it happens, that the word of God, so holy and so venerable, should cease to be suitable to the taste of the times, and especially at court. The mysteries of our religion, explained heretofore, and displayed to the people, were the admired topics of pulpit eloquence. At present, as their faith grows remiss and languid, they find these noble subjects insipid; and they who handle them being forced, in some sort, to condescend to the wrong disposition of their hearers, either wave them entirely, or but slightly touch upon them. Were the fathers of the church to revive, and to preach before this very audience those eloquent discourses which they delivered to the people, (and which are still in our hands,) God Almighty knows whether they would not be deserted. The praises of the saints, the wonders which the Lord performed by his elect, were affecting subjects heretofore for the faithful. Hence, the dispensers of God's word drew certain shining and convictive examples, which animated, encouraged, and served as models and as rules of life. How would these examples be received at this day? Nothing will serve but a delicate doctrine, a studied doctrine, a doctrine which shall lay open the heart of man, and shall stand as a mirror, in which each one may contemplate, not his own vices, but the follies of his neighbour. And who can tell but this doctrine will meet in time the same destiny, and lose the only ingredient that makes it now supportable? What, in that case, shall a preacher do to gain over souls? Or by what means

shall the grace of Jesus Christ make its way, without a miracle, into the hearts of men?

Alas! Christians, what are we come to? And to what an extremity is our faith reduced? Whence can arise such an irregularity, unless it be said that God hath abandoned us? And where can it end but in our destruction? Having a relish no longer for the word of God, what can the consequence be to us but death? To this pass, Christians, we are insensibly drawn by the spirit of the world. We seek the agreeable, and slightly pass over the serious and the solid; are fond of what pleases, and despise what instructs, amends, and reforms; destroy, (and if I may venture so to express myself,) annihilate the virtue of the most holy verities: "Because truths are diminished among the children of men." Ps. xi.

Happy, therefore, O God, thrice happy, those tractable and faithful Christians who relish your holy word, and give ear to it, because they relish it: "Blessed are they that hear." Their hearts (like properly cultivated land) receive this good seed, which takes root, and fructifies a hundred fold. Are they involved in darkness? It is a light that directs them. Are they sunk in listlessness? It is a grace that invigorates them. Excite in us, O Lord, an ardent desire, and wholesome relish for this word of truth, this word of holiness, this word of salvation. But, O my God, by inspiring us with a love of it, grant that to this end we may not abuse it, but that we may love it as your word, which I shall make the subject of the second part.

Part II. St. Paul (instructing the primitive Christians concerning the eucharist, the most glorious and sublime of all our mysteries) makes use of a very remarkable expression, to let them see the ill use which was made in those days (and which indeed is still made every day in Christendom) of this adorable sacrament: "He that eateth and drinketh (says he) unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself." 1 Cor. xi. The reason is, that he eateth and drinketh, "not discerning the body of the Lord." Observe, if you please, that the apostle reduceth the abuse of communion to this one point; the receiving the body of Christ our Saviour, not discerning that it is the body of Christ our Saviour; the using this celestial food, which is offered on the altar, like common food; the not receiving it with that holy and re-

pectful disposition, which the flesh of an immolated God requires; the making no difference between eating and communicating, nor distinguishing between the sacred and a profane table. An abuse, which in those first ages of the church might have sprung from the ignorance of the Gentiles, or Jews but newly converted to the faith of Christ; but which, from our want of a lively faith, and from our corrupt manners, is become more frequent and more criminal, as nothing is more ordinary, or more deplorable than to see at this day, Christians communicate without discerning the food which is offered them; that is, without steadfastly believing that this divine food is the flesh of their Redeemer: "Not discerning the body of the Lord."

Now this I shall apply to the present subject; and although the comparison is not strictly just, I shall use it, notwithstanding, in place of proof, whereon to ground my first proposition.

We commit every day, a thousand abuses, in the use which we make of the word of God; and wo betide us, if while we commit them, we are ignorant of them, or not affected with them. But, beloved Christians, the abuse with which we should chiefly reproach ourselves, and without intermission, too, and from which all the others derive, is, that we apply not our thoughts in the manner we should do to this adorable word: I mean, that we hear it as the word not of God, but of man; that when it is announced to us, instead of raising ourselves above ourselves, in order to receive it with the mental preparation, which makes it to us equally venerable and profitable, by our calling to mind that it is the word of the Lord, we form ideas of it entirely human; that we equally dishonour it (as St. Chrysostom remarks) by approving or despising it, as both by our approbation and by our contempt, we judge of it as though it were man, not the God of all power, that spoke. This, experience hath taught me; this it will teach you; and of this I shall endeavour to lay before you the heinousness.

And indeed, beloved hearers, it cannot be denied, that this abuse is one of the principal irregularities we can fall into; an irregularity (says St. Augustin) with regard to God, who, according to the scripture, being a jealous God, is particularly so of the honour of his word, and with regard to ourselves, who by that means reduce to nothing, the whole virtue which the author of grace communicates to it for our sanctification.

1st. When you discern not properly the body of Christ Jesus,

St. Paul, with reason, condemns you of profanation, "being guilty of the body and blood of the Lord;" and by the same rule I hold that you profane the word of God, when you cannot, according to the spirit of your religion, distinguish between it and the word of man. I shall not attempt to draw, in this place, a parallel between these two irregularities, in order to make out their excess and grievousness. A sacrilegious communion you detest and abhor; and far from weakening or diminishing in you so just a sentiment, I would, were it possible, increase and strengthen it. But what grieves me is, that for all this horror of an unworthy communion, you have no horror of outraging God, by hearing (if I may be allowed to use the expression) his word unworthily; and I pray the Almighty that the horror of the one, by a natural consequence, may stir up in your heart a detestation of the other. Tremble, would I say, when you eat the bread of angels with as little faith, as you would eat earthly and material bread; for such proceeding is a crime which you can never sufficiently detest. But yet would I add, tremble when you hear the word we preach with as little devotion as if it were an academical discourse, not making the distinction requisite between it, and that of man; a distinction which Almighty God himself makes, and wills you to make. In the abuse of a sermon there is a kind of sacrilege, which bears analogy to the abuse of communion. Brethren, (says St. Augustin,) the word which we hear, is as precious and sacred in our regard, as the body of Christ Jesus. This he laid down as an incontestible maxim; which however rational, needed be supported by his authority. He, therefore, (says he) is in some shape as criminal, and as much exposed to St. Paul's anathema, who abuses and profanes this holy word, as he who profanes the body of our Saviour by suffering it to fall, and trampling it under foot.

You must grant, however, beloved hearers, what every day happens, but to which, perhaps, you have never adverted, and which you have never made the motive, in the presence of God, of your shame and sorrow. If people came to hear the word of God as the word of God, would they come through a spirit of curiosity to examine it, through a spirit of malignity to censure and ridicule it, through a spirit of interest to pay their court, through a spirit of vanity, to see and be seen; shall I say it, and will it not be offensive to you? through a spirit of sen-

quality to meet the destructive object of their passion, and satisfy the desires of their carnal heart?

Alas! Christians, ought we not to blush to be present at, and hear it with these dispositions? Ought not this thought, it is the word of my God that I am going to hear, to be sufficient to strike us with a salutary fright? Taken up with this thought, ought we not to resort to it with an humble mind, a recollected soul, a heart affected and penetrated with lively sentiments of religion, in the same manner that we should approach the most awful and august of sacraments, the sacrament of the altar? For, this is the true and just idea which we ought to entertain of the word of God. When, therefore, you hear it with contrary views, it is manifestly plain, you no longer regard it as the word of God, but as the word of man. Such is the abuse I am endeavouring to reform; an abuse which can never be sufficiently deplored. For (says St. Chrysostom) God speaking as God, would be heard as God; and when he speaks by the mouths of his preachers, who are his organs, he requires that these organs be heard like himself: "He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me." Luke x.

But you, without tracing the matter higher, would hear them as men, controul them as men, turn them into ridicule and discredit them as men; and what you would not do to a servant of the crown, how mean soever, who should legally declare to you his majesty's orders, and speak to you in his name, you do with impunity, and without scruple, to the minister of your God. And now can you wonder that I appeal to yourselves, and that I impeach you at the bar of your own conscience, for having a hundred and a hundred times profaned, and for still daily profaning this holy deposit, with which we are entrusted on your account, the ministry of God's word.

2ndly. From such profanation, by an infallible consequence, follows the inutility of the divine ministry. For, the word of God, received and heard as the word of man, can produce effects proportioned only to the word of man; and it is an article of faith, that the word of man, however affecting, convincing, forcible and powerful soever it may be, in other respects, is, of itself, but a useless instrument in regard to salvation. This the apostle explained to the Thessalonians: "Therefore," says he, "we also give thanks to God without ceasing; because when ye had received

from us the word of the hearing of God, ye received it not as the word of man, but (as it is in truth) the word of God, who worketh in you." 1 Thess. ii. This is the source of all those blessings, which the Lord has been pleased to shower down upon your church; this hath given lustre and renown to your faith, and hath made it a model for all the churches of Greece and Asia. And Theophilact observes, that it was, without doubt, the word of St. Paul which so happily operated in the hearts of these proselytes, but which operated in them as the word of God.

On the other hand, Christians, give me leave to lay before you a striking instance of the word of God operating, though preached by St. Paul himself, as the word of man. This great apostle makes his way to Lycaonia, in order to promulgate the law of God. The inhabitants give ear to, and are charmed with his words; they follow him in crowds, they worship him with frankincense, and prepare to sacrifice to him as a divinity, not doubting that he was Mercury and the god of eloquence: "They called Barnabas, Jupiter; but Paul, Mercury, because he was chief speaker." Acts iv. This it should seem, was a good disposition for receiving the gospel. Ah! Christians, let us rather say, it was an obstacle to its progress. They heard St. Paul, but they heard him as man; else they would not have thought of making him a god. Therefore his words acted on their minds as the words of a man. And, in reality, those eulogies and applauses are the ordinary fruits of the words of men, possessed with the power of delivering their thoughts with accuracy and elegance, perspicuity and precision, energy and gracefulness; but more expect not. Oh! the unfathomable depth of God's wisdom! Of this innumerable multitude of admirers, not one infidel doth St. Paul convert; and of all these enraptured hearers of the word, there is not one who renounces his errors to embrace the faith.

And, indeed, this is the case of numberless worldlings at this day. They corrupt, or, to use a figure which the divine Spirit hath used, they adulterate the word. Little concerned about the fruit it produces, they seek only the pleasure, "adulterating the word." What shall the most zealous preacher do? Shall he depict the horror and infamy of sin, the severity of God's judgments, the consequences of death? They will mind no more than the justness of his plan, the energy of his expression, the arrangement of his arguments, the beauty of his remarks. Shall he show

the importance of eternal salvation, and the vanity of the fleeting things of this life? They will agree that nothing can be said more sublime, and that it is all noble, rational, and connected; but will draw no inference for their conduct in life. They will admire, indeed, but will not be converted; dishonouring (says St. Augustin) the word of God, by the praises which they give it, or which they rather take from it, to confer them on a man, who only dispenses it.

In this manner the Jews acted, when the prophet Ezekiel denounced the calamities, with which, as a righteous punishment of their crimes, God would quickly afflict them. For the scripture informs us, that they were pleased with his words, but not moved by his threats; and God himself points out the reason: "The children of thy people still are talking of thee by the walls and in the doors of the houses." Ezek. xxxiii. Instead of glorifying my word, they extol thee. They invite one another to "come and hear it;" and in fact they come, but hear it as though "Thou wast a musical song, which is sung with a sweet and pleasant sound." Ezek. xxxiii. But observe (says the Lord) that they are satisfied with hearing the instructions you give, and that they assume to themselves the unfortunate privilege of neglecting to practise them: "They hear thy words, and do them not;" (Ezek. xxxiii.); because they are thy words which they hear, and not mine: "They hear THY words." Now your word may be graceful, and may please the ear, but will never have the force to convert the heart.

Accordingly (says St. Jerom) God's honour requires, that the conversion of souls, the great work of his grace, should not be attributed to the word of men, nor to his own, confounded with that of men. You would hear this preacher, because he pleases you; but it is not from that which pleases you in him, but from simplicity of faith, that Almighty God chooses your conversion should arise. It were vain to hope that he would change this order, and establish for you a particular law. But how will he punish you? By your own means. He will suffer the unavailing word of man to fall to your share, as it is that which you seek; but his own he will reveal to the truly faithful, who receive it with tractability and an humble mind; or, in clearer terms, he will leave you of this word what is specious and unprofitable, to which you are attached; but all that is solid and conducive to

salvation, he will keep in store for his chosen friends, who seek nothing in his word but his very word.

Strange and pernicious abuse! We resort to sermons with a view to judge of preachers' talents, to compare their merits, to decry some, to prefer others: and often may be seen in the same town, in the same court, concerning the ministers of the gospel doctrine, the same difference of sentiment and opinion, that was seen heretofore at Corinth concerning the ministers of baptism: "While one said, I indeed am of Paul, and another, I am of Apollo." 1 Cor. i. Ah! (cries St. Paul) beloved brethren, why this contention, why this partiality? "Is Christ divided? Was Paul then crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" 1 Cor. i. Have you not been sanctified by the same God? Doth not the same God instruct you by our mouths? "God exhorting by us." 2 Cor. v. Who are we, (said elsewhere, St. Peter preaching to the Jews,) to deserve that you should employ your thoughts about us, or show any distinguishing respect to our persons? Why should you regard us, since we only perform the office of ambassadors? "Why wonder ye at this? Or why look ye upon us?" Acts iii. Were I not endowed with this sacred quality of ambassador from Christ, should I dare, this day, to appear in this pulpit, in which I have already appeared so often, before the greatest of monarchs, and so near him, too, and raise my voice in the midst of the most splendid court in the world, if, unworthy as I am, I were not convinced, and you were not likewise fully convinced, that the Lord of heaven hath entrusted me with his word, and that it is in his name I declare his will? "Why marvel ye at this? Or why look ye upon us?"

Yet though it be true, that all preachers, in consequence of their mission, are ambassadors from God, and the organs of his will, may we not make choice of one before another, and be more attached to one than another? Yes, Christians; and a choice of that nature may be good and profitable; but then it should be made with a view to salvation, and regulated according to the rules of prudence. Thus Ananias the disciple was chosen, preferably to all others, to be the teacher and master of him who was to be the teacher of all nations. Thus God himself inspired St. Augustin, as yet a sinner, with a desire of receiving instruction from St. Ambrose, and attentively considering the rules he should dictate. Thus, beloved hearers, perhaps God hath resolved to work your conversion by the

ministry of some preacher, and hath furnished him with grace for that purpose; for, things of this kind happen every day, nor is any thing more ordinary in the ways of Providence.

But if you desire to choose in such a manner, that the honour due to God's word may be preserved, and you may reap, yourself, advantage from it, I shall here lay down two important admonitions, which you needs must observe. First, among the ministers of God's holy word, prefer not one, so as to despise another. For as they are all of them sent by God, you must honour them all; and perhaps your contempt would fall upon one appointed by heaven to convert a whole people. Now Providence hath ordained, that there be preachers for this people, as well as for you. Secondly, in your choice, have nothing in view but your own perfection, and spiritual advancement: that is, in fixing your choice on a preacher, be influenced solely by the desire of salvation; for, things must be desired to their proper end. Now the word of God hath no other end than our sanctification. When for bodily health I make choice of a physician, I examine not whether he be orator, or philosopher; whether he converse like a well-bred man, or deliver his thoughts with propriety and elegance: but I require that he have experience, and understand his business; I require that he have skill to find out the nature of my constitution, and can cure my disorder; and this is enough. If, therefore, I meet with a minister of the gospel, whose discourses edify me, who makes an impression on me, who is gifted with the method of moving my heart, who bears me efficaciously and strongly toward God, such discourses I ought to hear with unwearied assiduity. This is the man whom God hath deputed to make me know his will; this is his ambassador from him to me. Though nature may have bestowed her qualifications on him with a sparing hand, yet he moves me, and converts me, and that is sufficient. By hearing his minister, I hear God himself; and my happiness is, that by hearing in his minister God himself, I draw down upon me the most powerful graces, and raise a strong fence against that fatal hardness of heart and reprobation, whither obstinate resistance to the word of God leads, as we now shall see in the third and last part.

Part III. There are certain things, the use of which is profitable to us in such a manner, that without detriment they may become unprofitable. But others there are, which, when unprofitable, by a woful fatality become prejudicial. Of this nature are

aliments and medicines. Food turns to poison, it fails to nourish; and physic is baneful that helps not to cure. Now, beloved Christians, the same may be said of the word of God. In the order of grace, it is the source of life; but when it gives not life, by inevitable necessity, it causes death. Wonder not (says St. Bernard) that God, in the scripture, professes it as nourishment and as a sword. For, it is nourishment to those who find it wholesome; but to those who receive no benefit from it, it may with equal pro priety be called a sword, of which the strokes are mortal. And thus Almighty God (adds the same holy doctor) perfectly verifies what he said by his prophet: "So shall my word be that goeth out of my mouth, (a word, of which my preachers are the organs only,) it shall not return unto me void, but shall (notwithstanding the iniquity of men) accomplish what I please." Isaiah lv.

But in what sense are we to understand, that the word of God is always attended with the execution of the orders of God himself? Is not the virtue of it perpetually impeded by our refractory spirit, and want of docility? No matter; (replies the angelical St. Thomas) for, God, in ordaining his word to be declared, hath two different wills, of which one is substituted in such a manner to the other, that if the first fail, the second of necessity must have its effect. His meaning is this: God would have his word produce grace and salvation; and this is his first will: but in the supposition that these effects are not produced, he will have it produce others, which are justice and wrath; and this is his second will. It is in my power to hinder either the one or the other of these two wills from being carried into execution; but it depends not on me to stop them both together, or to obstruct the accomplishment of the one or the other. That is, I may make it, as I choose, a word of life or of death, because I may, as I choose, hear it with a rebellious or submissive mind. But to hinder it from having either one or other of these two qualities, is beyond my power. And this is what God tells us every day with great truth: "It shall not return unto me void, but shall accomplish what I please" But what are the effects of that justice which is annexed, as often as we resist it, to the word of God? They are clearly specified, beloved Christians, in the sacred page. The sinner's obduracy, and his condemnation at God's tribunal—effects, which stand in direct opposition to the designs of God, in making us participate of his sacred word. For, the view of God, (continues this angelical

doctor,) was, that it should soften and bend our stony hearts; but unfortunately it hardens them by the resistance we make. The view of God was, that it should work our justification; but proportionably as this resistance increases, it impeaches and condemns us, in order, one day to confound us thoroughly before the supreme Judge. Once more, let me crave your attention.

1st. Sometimes the Almighty, without prejudice to any of his divine attributes, particularly his sanctity, hardens the hearts of men. This himself declares: "I will harden his heart, the heart of Pharaoh" Exod. iv. But the manner in which he who is charity itself, contributes to this obduration, is a mystery I revere, but shall not in this place attempt to examine. For me the doctrine of faith is sufficient: and the same faith which teaches me, that the Lord "hath mercy on whom he will," lets me also know, that he "hardeneth the heart of whom he will." Now I hold that the worldling is precipitated by nothing into this woful state, more effectually than by despising the word of God; and of this I draw the proof from the example of Pharaoh. Endeavour, dear Christians, to understand it thoroughly; and acknowledge that what visibly happened in the person of that reprobated prince, is inwardly renewed every day in those sinners whom St. Paul calls vessels of wrath and damnation.

The Lord God replenishes Moses with his Spirit; he puts his word into his mouth, and tells him: "Thou shalt speak all that I command thee, and Pharaoh shall not hearken to thee, but I will harden his heart." Exod. iii. Correspodent with this direful threat is the effect. The holy legislator faithfully executes the mandate given him; but as often as he speaks in the name of his God, the sacred text adds, that "the heart of Pharaoh is hardened." It is the God of Israel (says Moses) who commands you to set free his people, and deliver them from the bondage in which you have detained them so unjustly and so long. But who are you, (answers Pharaoh,) and who is that God, whose authority you allege? Where are the proofs and tokens of your mission? You shall bear witness to them, (replies the envoy of heaven); and smiting the ground with the mystical rod, which he held in his hand, covered Egypt with darkness, and filled the whole land with those other scourges, which the scripture depicts in such frightful colours. Is it not surprising, that Pharaoh, notwithstanding all these prodigies, should obstinately persist in his dis-

obedience? No, Christians, it is not to be wondered at, because it was thereby that God took vengeance for the horrid affront put upon his word, and because so extravagant and outrageous a resistance as that of Pharaoh's, ought not to be attended with a less chastisement. Ah! never punish us, O Lord, in that manner; and rather than give us up to so fatal an obduracy, pour down upon us every other kind of vengeance. Send us, as you sent to the obstinate Pharaoh, adversities, calamities, and humiliations. If we be but actuated ever so little by the spirit of Christianity, we shall bow down and submit to them without reluctance. But, O my God, preserve us from that execrable hardness of heart, which would make us insensible to the influence of your grace, and to every thing relating to our eternal welfare. Oh! banish far from us a heart of stone.

However, Christians, this is the case. By opposition to God, and to his divine word, this heart of stone is gradually formed. Ask me not (says St. Bernard) what a heart of stone is? It is yours, if you are not in agitation and terror; for it must be a very hard heart indeed, that is not filled with horror, as it hath no feeling of its own condition. Accordingly, let a minister of the gospel endeavour by every motive of intimidation, to prevail over and rouse it, all is labour lost. Nothing affects it, neither promises, nor menaces, nor rewards, nor chastisements.

2ndly. Wherefore, this word, which ought to be instrumental towards the sinner's justification, is of no farther use than to forward his condemnation. For, the more precious the talent which was put into his hands, is, the more criminal he appears for not having applied it to any good purpose; the greater efficacy the word of God had to move and convert him, the more culpable he is for having destroyed its whole virtue. Upon this account it was, that our Lord thundered out such terrible anathemas against the hardened inhabitants of Bethsaida and Chorazin. And it must (says Origen) have been a cursed soil, indeed, in which so fruitful a seed as that of God's word could produce nothing. It was for the same reason, that the Saviour of the world commanded his apostles to leave towns and villages, where they should not be hearkened to, and to shake the dust off their feet, at their departure, in order to convince the unbelieving people, that they were rejected by Almighty God. In fine, it is in the same sense that St. Augustin explains that important monition which is given us

by our Saviour: "Agree with thy adversary betimes, while thou art in the way with him." Matt. v. This adversary (says the forementioned father) is the word of God, which, by our resistance to it, we raise up against us. It combats our vices, our habits, and our passions. But let us endeavour, in consequence of our blessed Lord's advice, to bring it over to our side. Let our morals be strictly conformable to its maxims. Let us hear, love, and practise its rules and documents, lest "perhaps the adversary deliver us to the judge, and the judge to the officer." Matt. v.

Yes, Christians, this formidable adversary, this word of God, will accuse you, will condemn you, will call out to God, and demand solemn justice, for all the contempt, and all the abuse it met with from you; and God, who is always faithful to his word, will do it to the full. Persons of two kinds will intervene at this judgment, and will close with the word, in order to second it, to wit, preachers and hearers: hearers, who honoured it, and were sanctified by it; and preachers, who delivered it, and whom God replenished with his holy Spirit: the former represented by the people of Nineve, the latter by the apostles. For, you know with what readiness the Ninevites obeyed, when the prophet Jonas preached penance to them: "The men of Nineve shall rise up in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they did penance at the preaching of Jonas." Matt. xii. Neither are you ignorant, that the Saviour of the world promised his apostles, and in them the faithful ministers of his word, that "they should sit on twelve seats, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Matt. xix.

Ah! my Lord, shall I then be employed in this melancholy province? After having preached so often to this audience? Shall I be their accuser? Shall I be their judge? Shall I pronounce reprobation against those I would save at the expense of my life? True it is, my God, it would be highest honour to be seated near you at the bar of your justice; but this high honour I should gain at the expense of so many souls, for whom you spilt every drop of your blood. Perhaps, too, in condemning them I should condemn myself, being obliged, more than they, to practise those holy truths I am preaching. Therefore I had rather have recourse, from this moment, both for them and for myself, to the bar of your mercy. I will earnestly supplicate you to shower down upon us the abundance of your graces, that by the virtue thereof your word may be to us a pledge of sanctification and of life everlasting.

SERMON VI.

ON FAITH.

"Jesus said to the centurion: Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done to thee." MATT. viii.

Is it not surprising, beloved Christians, that the Saviour of the world, instead of attributing to his omnipotence itself, and to the virtue of God, the miracles of his omnipotence, should in the sacred page, for the most part attribute them to the faith of men? Powerful in works and in words, he cast out devils, cured diseases, raised the dead to life. But although of all this he might well have reserved to himself the glory, while others reaped the benefit, he gives it wholly to faith; as though faith alone had operated through him that which he alone operated for faith: "Go thy way," says he, "and as thou hast believed, so be it done to thee." This is the answer which he makes the centurion, who comes to him, begging that he would restore to health his servant stricken with a mortal palsy: and this is the answer which he made on so many other occasions, relatively to so many other persons; every where admiring and extolling faith, he who, it should seem, ought to admire nothing; every where proclaiming its force and efficacy; every where giving to understand that it was capable to obtain of him anything: "Go thy way, and as thou hast believed, so be it done to thee."

From these premises, certain heterodox teachers of the two last centuries drew this false consequence: that the whole business of man's salvation rests solely upon faith; an error which the church of God hath proscribed, as tending directly to destroy among Christians the practice and necessity of good works. But I, beloved hearers, shall draw, without running into such an extreme, a much more solid subject from the gospel; a subject which is the groundwork of all Christian morality. And adhering to the words of the Son of God: "As thou hast believed, so be it done to

thee," I shall set forth the genuine effects of faith, as it concerns salvation.

In whatever manner, beloved Christians, I mean to explain this interesting subject, my design is not to seek ways and expedients to reconcile the opinion of modern heretics with the doctrine of the church, in regard to the efficacy and virtue of faith, as I learn from St. Augustin, that there is no mean between error and truth, but that it is incumbent on me to confess the one, and to abjure the other. The opinion, or, more properly, the error of our modern heretics is, that faith alone is sufficient to justify us in the presence of God; that good works, how perfect soever, contribute in no measure or degree to salvation; that life everlasting is granted us merely by way of inheritance, not as a reward; an inheritance, which it is not in our power to merit, and of which, without having acquired a right to it, we enter on the possession. Such is the language of heresy; but this is the language of orthodoxy. It is an article of faith, that faith, of itself, is insufficient to save us; that our good works make a great part of our justification; that we acquire, in virtue of these good works, a right to the glory which God prepares for us; and that his glory, by a marvellous effect of the grace of Christ Jesus, is at the same time (as St. Augustin expresses it) the gift of God, and the merit of man.

But waving a controversy, beloved Christians, unsuitable to the present time and audience, I advance two orthodox and incontestible propositions, which shall make the division of this discourse.

1st. It is Faith that saves us.

2ndly. Oftentimes it is faith that condemns us.

They seem contradictory, at first view. But this seeming contradiction will afford me an opportunity of developing the noblest and most sublime theological principles and maxims relating to this important subject. The righteous saved, the wicked condemned, by faith. That the righteous will owe their salvation to faith, because their justification, in a special manner, arises from faith; you shall see in the first part. That the wicked will owe their damnation to faith, because their reprobation proceeds from faith, unattended with good works; you shall see in the second.

Part I. It is faith that saves us. This proposition is too expressly set down in the scriptures to be called in question. But the point is to know, in what manner, and in what sense, it is true to say, that it is faith which saves. Whereupon I assert, that we

are saved by faith two ways—as the *perfection* of our good works, and as the *principle* of our good works: as the perfection of our good works, because it is from faith that the efficacy and value of our good works derive. As the principle of our good works, because it is from faith that the holy ardour which impels us to practise them particularly derives to us. The sequel will put these two reflections in a clearer light. Bend all your attention to the one and the other.

1st. In what manner soever divines explain the justification of men, it is an undoubted truth, as the scripture informs us, that in the sight of heaven our actions draw their efficacy and value from faith; so that faith is the perfection, as it were, of our virtues, and all our good works. I cannot be saved, nor pretend to the reward which God hath allotted me, independently of the merit of good works. This is indubitable. But I must likewise own, that my good works can have no merit before God, but by faith. Faith it is, that must impress them with the seal of eternal life, which St. Paul excellently denominates "a seal of the righteousness of the faith." Rom. iv. And St. Chrysostom tells us, that as a piece of coin which should not be distinguished by the prince's mark, how valuable soever it might otherwise be, would be deemed of no value, or use in the common intercourse of trade; so whatever I do, though honourable, laudable, and even great and heroical, if I do it not in the spirit, and it bear not wholly the characteristic of faith, it were presumption to suppose it conducive to salvation. This, beloved Christians, hath always been held incontestible in our religion, and ought to be the rule of our whole conduct. This is what the apostle inculcated to the Jews with so much zeal. This is what St. Augustin proved against the Pelagians with such energy and solidity. This is what the fathers remonstrated incessantly to the heretics of their times; and this is what the preachers of the gospel at this day, more than ever, should make known to their audiences: that without faith, I say, a sincere, humble, obedient faith, whatever we do is of no utility toward a blissful eternity.

Observe, Christians, my way of reasoning. The Jews put their trust in the works of the law; that is, in the sacrifices which the law of Moses commanded them to offer; and provided that they inviolably observed this law, they were thoroughly convinced, that all the promises made to Abraham would be fulfilled in them.

You are mistaken, my brethren, (St. Paul tells them;) you will not be saved by the practice of your law, but by the faith of Christ Jesus. Immolate whatever victims you please, purify your bodies ever so much, make what professions you will of an exact and religious worship, if all these observances, and all these ceremonies, be not sanctified by faith, they are to no purpose. You have been justified by faith, and faith it is that must give you access to the throne of God. Thus, this apostolical man spoke to them.

The Pelagians depended on their natural good works, which they thought God regarded in the distribution of his favours, calling some and not others; making choice of some in preference to others, for the good works of nature, to receive this grace of vocation and election. And (with St. Prosper) it must be acknowledged, that this error had something extremely specious in it. But it was still an error; and the great St. Augustin was raised, by God, to encounter and destroy it. No, (cries this incomparable doctor,) the case is not so. The natural good works, on which you rely, are of no effect in regard to salvation. They incline not God to grant us his grace; neither will he consider them to all eternity. The merit of our lives is annexed to faith; and nothing without it can bring us to him.

In short, the heretics of almost every age of the church, have laid great stress on their good works; and by a blind presumption, flattered themselves that they lived in their sect more holily than the Catholics, were more reformed, more austere, more addicted to the pious exercises of charity and penitence; and to judge only by the exterior, their pretensions were sometimes not ill founded. But the fathers answered, that their boasts were groundless, their faith being unsound; that all their vaunted works of piety, how shining soever, were dead works, and all their virtues chimerical phantoms, as however fruitful they had been with faith, they were barren without it; that in no field, save in the field of the universal church, could they reasonably hope to gather good fruit; that whosoever should sow in any other field, would be a loser and a squanderer; for here I make use of their own expressions: that it was in this church, which being universal, was the only depositary of true faith, God, according to the testimony of David, was willing to be praised: "With thee is my praise in the great church;" (Ps. xxi.;) that out of it he gave ear to no praise or prayers; and that if any one presumed, with a corrupt faith,

to appear at his altars, in order to perform the duties of religion, it was to him he addressed, in a special manner, these tremendous words: "What hast thou to do to declare my justice? or that thou shouldest take my testament in thy mouth?" Ps. xlix. That good works, unaccompanied by faith, far from being a fund of merit to sectaries, would rather be a cause of confusion before God, as he not only would be well pleased or satisfied with the good which they did, unless they believed what they were bound to believe, but would judge them more rigorously for not having believed what they ought to have believed, although they did the good they were bound to do; in a word, that in the Christian world, it was not by the substance absolutely of works, but by the quality of faith, that God discriminated the righteous from the wicked. All this is taken from St. Augustin; wherefore he inferred, that a Christian, who should practise whatever is most holy, whatever is most perfect, in his station of life, but should still be deficient in integrity of faith, would be eternally the object of divine reprobation.

Such was the language, beloved Christians, of those great men, whom God in his wisdom hath given us for teachers; and such the origin of the frightful irregularity, into which innumerable haughty minds, seduced by the demon of infidelity, have fallen. Ah! Christians, who can conceive this, and form a just idea of it? Who can, for instance, ascertain how much merit the heresy of Calvin hath destroyed? How many good works it hath rendered ineffectual? What virtues it hath corrupted, and what admirable fruits of grace it hath destroyed in the presence of God, which the true faith would have brought to maturity? For, in short, let it be owned (though it were but to adore the unfathomable depths of God's judgments); let it be owned sincerely (and by the testimony we shall bear to a truth which doth not concern us, let us convince ourselves feelingly and efficaciously of another, in which our all is at stake); let it be owned, that in those unfortunate sects, which schism hath raised up, some good hath been done, at least to appearance. In the midst of those tares, the enemy that had sown them, affected to make a good grain appear. Some were modest, charitable, abstemious. It is, nevertheless, incumbent on us, from the tenets of our religion, to believe that as they bore not the sign of the living God on their foreheads, that is the sign of faith; how wonderful soever their deeds might

have been, God told them perpetually: "I know you not." They prayed, it is true, but their prayers were reprobated; they fasted, but God disregarded their fasts; and had they made their complaints to him, and asked the reason; had they said, like the Jews: "Wherefore have we fasted, and thou seest not; have we humbled our souls, and thou takest no notice?" Isai. lv. God, ever righteous, and ever certain that his proceedings are righteous, would have made them this answer, founded in reason, and filled with indignation: "Behold, in the day of your fast, your will is found;" (Isai. lv.;) your pride, your obstinacy, your rebellion, your disposition of heart, directly opposite to that submission and obedience of the understanding, which the purity of my church's faith required.

And, indeed, when they appeared, at the instant of death, before Almighty God, and produced their good works performed in heresy, how inclined soever he is to reward, he was obliged, in his justice, for the gravity of their sin, to reject and reprobate them, and by the mouth of his prophet to pronounce this melancholy, dreadful sentence: true it is, "ye have sown much; (but your misfortune is, that) ye have brought in little: ye looked for much, and lo! it came to little." Agg. i. Ye hoped to be greater gainers than your brethren, who, without refinement, followed the beaten track of faith; but by grasping at a shadow, ye have lost the real and substantial proof which ye might have acquired. "Ye brought into the house, and I did blow upon it." Agg. i. Ye heaped up a treasure, but a treasure of dust, which the winds swept away, and scattered in the air. And "for what reason? saith the Lord of hosts. Because (continues he) my house is left waste, and ye have every man hastened into his own house." Agg. i. Because ye have abandoned my house, the church, and retired to houses of your own making; because ye have wantonly set up churches after your own fancy; because ye have sucked in the poison of innovation, and hearkened to uncommisioned teachers and preachers; and because, by an unaccountable and capricious infidelity, ye have adopted their sentiments, and preferred their conduct to the universal rule which I had established. This, says the Lord, (by the mouth of his prophet,) this is the worm which spoiled and corrupted all your works.

Now, what Almighty God, beloved Christians, said at that time, we may well say at this, and apply it to ourselves. For,

although among Catholics, or rather among those who bear that name, there are no declared heretics; you know what numbers there are whose faith may at least be doubted, inasmuch as it is not complete and pure. True it is, that they have not quitted the pale of the church; but they may remain in the pale of the church externally, and want her faith. They may be in the communion of the body of the church, and not of her spirit. They are good livers, you tell me; and charity obliges me to close with your assertion,, notwithstanding some instances that might render their sincerity equivocal and questionable. But let them, if you please, be angels or martyrs, with respect to morals, if nevertheless they are wanting in purity of faith, humility of faith, sincerity of faith, plenitude of faith, I will answer with St. Paul, that they are hateful objects in the sight of heaven; because, "without faith it is impossible to please God." Heb. xi. And I will add with St. Cyprian, that it is faith, not their blood, which God requires.

If, beloved Christians, we be fully persuaded of this important truth, in how great estimation shall we hold the precious gift of faith? With what care shall we preserve it? We shall not only live in apprehension of losing it, but of hurting its beauty by the smallest blemish, and of letting its chastity (as St. Ambrose expresses it) suffer contamination in any shape. For, this holy father considered faith, as a virgin whom the slightest stain dishonoured; and such were his words, in speaking of St. Paul, and of the primitive Christians, whose conduct that great apostle inspected: "He feared lest they should lose the virginity of faith." In all polemic debates whatever, instead of so much reasoning and examining, instead of pursuing either our prejudice or our interest, we shall beware of forming any other resolution, than that of paying filial obedience, and showing a perfect attachment to the church; that is to say, than that which stops all disputes and divisions; than that which the fathers have always and above all things earnestly recommended; than that which will preserve us from all delusions, and all devious steps; than that on which God showers down his blessings, being obliged, himself, to direct and protect us, and willing to work miracles, rather than permit us to wander blindly, and be lost in the mazes and intricacies of error. We shall frequently offer up the same prayer to God, that the apostles did to Christ: "Lord, increase our faith;" (Luke xvii.;)

purify our faith, corroborate our faith; for I know, my God, that it is faith must save us, not only because it gives value to all the good works which we practise, and is itself, as it were, their intrinsic excellence; but farther, because it induces us to practise them, and is the very fountain from which they flow.

2ndly. And truly these are two different things, to act, and to act well. Accordingly, though faith be a necessary condition for the perfecting of our works, as often as we act; it is no good consequence, that therefore it carries with it the peculiar virtue of impelling us to action. I am not endued with the power of doing the works of salvation without faith. This is the first proposition I laid down. But it differs widely from this other; so soon as I have faith, I feel myself warmed, and impelled to perform the works of salvation. Nor is anything better adapted to inspire us, on this head, with the zeal and activity which we admire in the saints, and in which Christian fervour essentially consists. Now, in this other manner it is that we work our salvation by faith.

For, only figure to yourselves, my brethren—(it is a comparison of St. Bernard's, and a very natural one it is)—figure to yourselves faith, and suppose it to the righteous, as the first mover is to the universe. That orb, which we call the first mover, hath so great a superiority over all the others, and influences them so powerfully, that he impresses them with his own movement and action; and while he rolls over our heads, makes them roll along with him, according to his impulse. Were this first mover to stop his course, the progressive motion of every other celestial body would cease; but as his movement is continual, that of the inferior orbs is never interrupted. It is just so with faith. Faith, in the soul, and in all the operations of divine grace, is the first mover. It is a virtue superior to all the rest; so that all the rest are subordinate to it, and act not relatively to eternal life, but as they are impelled by it. What I do for God, I do it in consequence of my having faith, and proportionably as I have it. If I have great faith, I am then determined to do great things for God. If I have but little faith, I sink into sloth, and do but little for God. If I have no faith at all, I shall infallibly do nothing at all for God.

This doctrine is plain and obvious, from our own experience; but St. Paul goes farther. He informs us, that faith is not only the impulsive cause that all virtues operates in us, but the efficient of all our virtues; and that all supernatural and divine virtues are

nothing, in strict propriety of speech, but the instruments of faith; a truth which he declares, in his epistle to the Galatians, in decisive terms, when he tells them that "faith worketh by charity." Gal. v. Weigh well these words. He says not that charity works by faith, but that faith works by charity, loves by charity, pardons by charity, relieves by charity; as though charity had no function peculiar to itself, and that whatever it did, or it undertook, was the work of faith. Now if it be faith, when we love God or our neighbour, that operates, (two duties, in which the whole compass of the law is included,) can any one doubt that it is not faith which radically saves and justifies us?

And hence it arises, that the same apostle, by a train of deductions, (which cannot be pondered with too much care,) easily attributes to faith alone, the most wonderful and heroic effects of all the other virtues. He admits (as I may say) but this one virtue in the Christian religion, and comprises in faith all Christian virtues, as we find that St. Augustin comprised them in charity. But St. Paul's theology is here more explicit than that of St. Augustin; for hear how he speaks in his excellent epistle addressed to the Hebrews. He proposes (in order to excite our zeal) the example of the patriarchs of the Old Testament; and concentrating their eulogy in one point of view, makes us clearly understand, that all the great and good things they did, were done by faith: that "Abel, by faith, offered to God a sacrifice more excellent than Cain's;" that "Abraham, by faith, offered Isaac when he was tried;" that "Moses, by faith, forsook Egypt;" (Heb. xi.;) and so on of many others. But how? (says St. Chrysostom.) Was it not his ardent charity for the people, that made Moses withdraw from the land of Egypt? Was it not the piety and religion of Abel, that made him so liberal, and offer up so many victims to God? Was it not obedience that impelled Abraham to yield submission to the decree of heaven, and form the resolution to sacrifice his only beloved child? Alas! all this (replies the holy doctor) was brought about by faith. Abraham, I own, obeyed God; and the obedience he paid him was more than human; but it was faith that obeyed in him, that stifled in his heart all the sentiments of nature, and made him piously cruel to his own blood. The reason is, that Abraham consented to the death of Isaac, and disposed himself to carry the order of heaven into execution, in virtue (to use the language of scripture) of that which he believed against

all belief, and of that which he hoped against hope itself: "Who, against hope, believed in hope." Rom. iv. And for this reason, (the scripture adds,) that "it was therefore imputed to him unto justice;" (Rom. iv.;) that is, he believed, and was, therefore, justified. The text says not, that he believed, and therefore obeyed God, went out of his house, gained the top of the mountain, pulled off Isaac's clothes, lifted his arm, and forthwith was justified; but only that he believed, and was therefore justified: not after the manner of florid declaimers, who eke out an argument with a chain of inferences, but of close reasoners, who draw the last consequence from the primary proposition. Abraham believed, and was therefore justified; because, in reality, whatever else contributed to promote his justification, is, as in its principle and first cause, included in this one word—*believed.*

Upon this account it is, that the Council of Trent, desirous to give an exact idea of faith, declares that "it is the commencement, the foundation, and the root of our justification." Mark well these three characteristic words, which are linked in such manner, and bear such analogy one to another, that the one signifies always more than the other, as more is imported by foundation than commencement, and by root than foundation. For, commencement is that which holds the first place in the order of things. But besides the foundation being the part by which the edifice commences, it is that which sustains it, and bears all its weight. Now to sustain is more than to begin. In like manner, although the root is the original of the tree, and bears its whole weight, it also produces all its branches, blossoms, and fruit. Now to produce is more than to sustain; and these are the three characteristics of faith. It is the first of all our virtues. Further, it is the support of all our virtues. Neither is this all; it produces in us all our virtues. That is, Christians, if I be righteous, not only I begin by faith, and am upheld by faith, but I act and live by faith, according to that oraculous expression of St. Paul: "My just man liveth by faith." Heb. x. Oh! what it is, beloved hearers, to be the just of God? How many may be called, at this very time, the just of men, who are criminals and sinners in the presence of God? But my just man (says the Lord) hath no other life, in quality of just man, than the life of faith; I acknowledge no other. "My just man liveth by faith."

And, in effect, if I live righteously, my whole life is of necessity

a life of faith. Whether I deliberate or act, fear or hope, seek or shun, it is by the impulse of faith. It is faith that makes me love my enemies, without which I should hate them. It is faith that makes me hate worldly pleasures, without which I should court them. It is faith that makes me forget injuries, without which I should indulge the ranklings of animosity, and take revenge. It is faith that makes me bless God in sufferings, makes me value poverty, makes me choose an austere penitential life, without which I should hold them all in abhorrence. Therefore, faith is the source and origin of all good, is my life and salvation: "My just man liveth by faith."

But if this be the case, how comes it to pass, that in the Christian religion, in the centre of the faith, that faith so spread all over the earth, so many Christians are, nevertheless, absorbed in the gulph of damnation, and so few arrive in the harbour of bliss? This, my brethren, this, I must own, is one of those difficulties, those mighty difficulties, which filled the fathers of the church with astonishment, and which seems to have held St. Augustin himself, with all his intellectual light, in suspense. This difficulty, however, I might elude, by contesting the principle on which it is founded; namely, that the faith is spread throughout all the world in the same degree that we are pleased to suppose it. No, no, would I say, it appears to be very far from evident; and for the honour and credit of the faith itself, I had rather question that it is so general, than grant that, being so general, it produces among us so little fruit. True it is, the preaching of the gospel is carried into every known part of the earth; but I would it were the same with regard to faith! for, faith differs widely from the preachng of the gospel. The one is external grace, independent on us; the other, an infused virtue, which we ought to cultivate, and preserve in our hearts. This preaching of the gospel, this external grace, by a favourable disposition of divine Providence, is very common; but I have great reason to fear that faith is very rare. Christ asked his disciples, if, when he should come, there would be faith upon the earth; either not believing (according to St. Chrysostom) that there would be any left, or foreseeing in his wisdom, that there would be but little: "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find, think ye, faith upon the earth?" Luke xviii. Now is not this word of our divine Saviour more than ever verified in these our days? Though the Son of

God had not spoken in that manner, would not the life which Christians lead, be more than sufficient to make me doubt of their faith? and from the knowledge, however little, which I have of the world, might I not conclude, at least suspect, that a secret and disguised leaven of infidelity hath effected a general corruption in their hearts? For (as St. Bernard further observes) it is hard to conceive that the generality of men should act quite differently from their own belief, and that so monstrous a contradiction should appear in their conduct, as that of living in the manner they live, and still retaining the faith in their hearts. In this supposed system, there is something so forcible, that it scarce can possibly be long maintained. When I see a Christian as passionate, as sensual, as ambitious as a pagan, and even more so than a pagan; instead of saying, as is commonly said on such occasions, that man belies his faith, I should almost say, that man is absolutely destitute of faith, because if he had any, it is inconceivable to me, that he should belie it so universally, and so constantly, and that believing one way, he should act another. When I see a woman, a lady of fashion, tranquil in her vices, licentious in her converse, loose in her communications, and scandalous in her intrigues; instead of saying (according to the ordinary language of the world) the faith of that woman is weak and languid, steril and fruitless, I would ask and say, is there a spark of faith remaining in that woman? because I am persuaded that more would not be necessary to give her a horror of her state, and induce her to relinquish it.

In this manner should I reason; and it would be both for the interests and honour of faith. For it would be more to its honour, that most men should be reputed ungodly and faithless, than be deemed to have a faith that should resist nothing, surmount nothing, perform nothing; what do I say? that should suffer them to fall into shameful vices, and utter abominations. And if it be urged, that those very sinners, who on one hand give the reins to their inordinate passions, and on the other loudly protest that they have faith: I know, would I say, that they loudly protest it; but the point is to know, what dependence may be had on their protestations, and were it not better to bring them to the test which St. James required: "Show me thy faith without works." James ii. If, therefore, dear Christians, you who, perhaps, pique yourselves on that which you have not, would ascertain me of your faith, make it good by your works; for so long as I find, that your

daily practice runs counter to your words, and I see no works, I shall have no reliance on your asseverations. And truly, beloved hearers, is not this what we are come to by the iniquity of the times? What assurance or conviction is there of the faith of Christians? How can it be determined, whether they have it, or have it not? Who knows what they are? Is not this the deplorable situation of that which is called the world? Enter into the stately places of princes, examine the lowly dwellings of the cottager, be present, if possible, at the secret counsels and schemes of politicians, take a survey of the manners in routs and assemblies, cast your eyes round in churches and holy places, every where you will doubt that there is no faith, because you will no where find anything but scandal and depravity of manners: "Shall he find, think ye, faith upon the earth?"

But I shall insist no longer on this topic. The libertine, perchance, might avail himself of it, and use it as a pretext to abide by his notions. For, one of the libertine's pretext is, that there is no faith, or real relief; whereby he pretends to impute his wickedness to what seems reasonable—a want of persuasion, not a corruption of heart. Be it, therefore, admitted, that of the vast number of Christian people who are lost in the world, there are many, in fact, who preserve the faith. Be every thing granted that can be granted: to wit, be it granted, that their faith subsists.

Be this their comfort, that it is in their power to keep it entire amidst all the excesses of a criminal life. The church disputes not this advantage with them; nay, she maintains them in the possession of it by an express decree of the Council of Trent, which declares, that destruction of faith is not a consequent, on all occasions, of a vicious life. Let us join issue with her. One may be a Christian, and a bad man; one may have the faith, and act against it. But shall we, in that case, be saved by faith? So far from it, our faith will condemns us, as I am going to make appear in the second part.

Part II. We ought not to wonder, beloved Christians, that the same faith which saves us, should be that which condemns us in the sight of God. In this it doth only what Christ himself doth. Though the author of our salvation, through the ill use we make of his merits and graces, becomes the author of our reprobation. So faith, which was given us for our justification, becomes instrumental toward our condemnation, according to the difference

of our behaviour to it, and the various treatment it receives from us. But, *why* doth it condemn us? and *how* doth it condemn us? Two important points these, which remain to be elucidated, and which call upon you for more than ordinary attention.

1st. I say, that faith, when we square not our lives to its maxims, condemns us, because we hold it (according to the expression of St. Paul) in injustice; because (to speak in the language of St. Ambrose) we deprive it of its fairest fruits, good works; and because (in the mind of St. James the apostle) we occasion its death in our very hearts. Now are not these so many affronts which we offer it, and for which, if I may venture so to speak, it will take vengeance by condemning us.

Mark my assertion: we hold it in injustice. They are the teacher of the Gentiles own words: "Who hold the truth of God in injustice." Rom. i. Now it is by faith that the truth of God is in us; and so long as we lead a disorderly life, it cannot be denied, that we offer it violence, and hold it in close subjection and bondage. The reason is, that we refuse it the liberty of acting in us in the manner it would and it ought to act. In the infancy of Christianity, (St. Bernard remarks,) when persecutions raged, the faith was free, while the faithful were in chains. But although persecutions are now no more, the faithful enjoy a liberty they abuse, and the faith is enchained, as it were, and held captive. Oh! how great reason for shame and condemnation! In prisons, and in dungeons, the martyrs proclaimed the faith with which their hearts were replenished, and, in spite of tyranny, confessed publicly the name of Jesus Christ. Strange! that now the church is in peace, the faith of Christians should no longer enjoy the same liberty, but that Christians themselves should become its persecutors, and exert more cruelty towards it than infidels, as they bring it into slavery, a slavery to which the power of infidelity could never reduce it: "Who hold the truth of God in injustice." Mind the word injustice; for, St. Paul says not barely, that we hold our faith captive; but that we hold it captive in injustice; which is the most shameful and invidious of all servitudes. This faith, indeed, is extremely holy; but we make it reside in extremely tepid and criminal souls. It is extremely chaste; but we make it dwell in extremely sensual and voluptuous souls: "We hold the truth of God in injustice." What, therefore, does faith do? Ah! beloved hearers, may I here be permitted to use this figurative

mode of speaking. Our faith thus treated, thus dishonoured and profaned, rises up against us, demands justice of God, and cries out to his tribunal. Nor can it be doubted that he hearkens to and sides with it, to our utter destruction.

In this particular, we are the more culpable and deserving of censure, because we destroy and bring to nought by our vicious lives, its finest fruit, and most blessed fecundity. For, as we have seen, faith is the origin of all our virtues, a fruitful origin, which continually produces new fruits of grace, or is capable to produce them. Of this assertion the proof is obvious. To say nothing of the patriarchs in the old law, and of their wonderful works, which the great apostle hath so accurately sketched out in his epistle to the Hebrews, call to mind the great things which have been done in the new, by so many martyrs of both sexes, and so many pious solitaries and penitents; which still are done by so many holy cloistered religious, and virtuous souls in the wide world. Revolve with yourselves whatever you have heard of their bloody flagellations, their protracted prayers, their watchings and labours, their abstinence and fasts, their zeal and fervour, and of the wonderful constancy with which they practised, to their latest breath, the whole compass of evangelical perfection. These are the fruits of faith; and these it may easily produce in us with our own concurrence. For although the fervency of the faithful be relaxed, the virtue of faith is no way diminished. It ever proposes to us the same truths, and in the same truths the same motives to excite and impel us. But, beloved Christians, as we live after the spirit of the world and the flesh, we nip these fruits in the very bud. Faith we want not; but active as it is, it makes us not more vigilant, not more exact in the observance of our duty, not more addicted to the works of godliness. It is listless and steril, because we put a stop to all its actions.

Nay, more: we are the death of it, according to the expression of St. James the apostle. For, faith is quickened by good works, which, as I may say, are its vivifying spirit. As the body, then, is dead, the moment the enlivening soul is departed, faith, in like manner, should be deemed extinct, if not accompanied with the good works by which it was animated: "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." Jaci. ix. And to take it in a plain and natural sense, without figurative expressions, we may affirm that nothing conduces more directly or

speedily to infidelity and licentiousness of belief, than licentiousness of manners. Now as you have wickedly murdered your faith, what can you in reason expect but a severe and rigorous sentence? Think, beloved hearers, think seriously, what it is to have murdered your faith. It is a grievous crime, for which you will one day be called to account, and obliged to undergo correspondent penalty. Then shall this faith, now dead in your heart, either through the slothfulness or viciousness of your life, revive all at once, rise up against you, and appear before God to your conviction and condemnation.

2ndly. I say to your conviction; for you desire to know, not precisely *why*, but *how* it will condemn you. And indeed, it is easy to make this point sufficiently clear. I shall do it by evincing the truth of the three following assertions: that you might have lived like a Christian: that you ought to have lived like a Christian: that you have not by any means lived like a Christian. Convinced of these, you will be unable to reply, and must, against your will, subscribe to the sentence of eternal reprobation pronounced against you.

Faith will convince you that it was in your power to have lived like a Christian, because nothing was wanting to that end, neither knowledge nor assistance. Not knowledge, inasmuch as it served you, itself, for a teacher, revealed to you all truths to enlighten your understanding, and, without intermission, raised tumults and alarms in the bottom of your heart; sometimes it stirred you up by hope, sometimes it restrained you by fear, sometimes it engaged you by a holy love, sometimes it attracted you by a solid advantage, always it instructed you and impelled you to rectitude. Not assistance, inasmuch as you had, in the Christian religion, all the succours of grace: so many sacraments to purify you, to strengthen you, to reconcile you to God, to feed your soul, and make you more and more virtuous; so many ministers of the Lord, depositories of the law of God, to instruct you in it, dispensers of the treasures of God to distribute them to you, filled with the Spirit of God to communicate it to you, invested with the power of God to sanctify you; so many good counsels, pathetic and vehement exhortations, salutary examples; in a word, so many means, to enumerate which would be an endless task, and the use of which would have infallibly saved you. Now, to have known, and to have been able, are the whole reasons why the wicked servant

shall be the more severely judged, the more rigorously condemned, and the more grievously punished.

You are still more deserving of God's chastisements, because faith will convince you not only that you ought to have led a Christian life, but that such was your duty. For, your word was engaged. You had made that promise in the face of the altar, and over the sacred font of baptism. You had solemnly renounced the devi land all his works, the world and all its pomps, the flesh and all its sensual desires. All this was promised and vowed in your name; and so soon as you were arrived at sufficient maturity, you ratified, yourself, the same promise and vow to God. Now a promise to God cannot be insignificant; and of all contracts, there is none more inviolable than that which is made with so great a master. The moment, therefore, that you submitted to the faith, you submitted to the law. That is, the moment you were honoured with the character of Christian, and began to bear that sacred name, you were consequently, and indispensably obliged to perform all the duties of a Christian, and were responsible for them to your faith and to your God.

But to put this matter in a clearer light, and to examine it more narrowly: of all contradictions, is there none more absurd, than to act more contradictorily to what we believe, or believe contradictorily to what we do? And of all infidelities, is it not one of the most criminal and monstrous, to have renounced, in the presence of God, to hell, and to the works of darkness, which are so many sins proscribed by the law, and to commit them with impunity, voluntarily, and habitually? To have renounced the pomps and vanities of the world, and to make them our idols? To wish for nothing else, to pant after them perpetually, to seek them without ceasing, and to take no pains but for that end, and with that view? To renounce the flesh, and live after the flesh, hearkening but to passion, and blindly following the lures and suggestions of corrupt nature.

Of this, however, will faith convince you; and it is the last testimony which it will bring against you: I mean, that notwithstanding it was quite in your power, and your incumbent duty, to lead a Christian life, yet your manner of life was directly the contrary. For, developing all these principles and maxims, it will compare them with your life; or developing your life, it will compare it with all these principles and maxims. Now what an

opposition! A faith which teaches us to despise terrestrial and perishable things; and a life taken up in procuring, preserving, hoarding them, by every manner of means, just or unjust, which an insatiable and unbounded avarice inspires. A faith which informs us, that it is our duty to be humble, and to decline the honours of this world, and its shadowy greatness; and a life employed in cares, in projects, in intrigues, sometimes very criminal, and all this to scrape together a wretched fortune. A faith which inculcates mortification, penance, and self-abnegation; and a life spent in gaming, at plays and routs, in parties of pleasure, and beastly voluptuousness. A practical and active faith, and a life devoid of all Christian works. Is this to be a Christian, or to live like a Christian? To do nothing of all that faith commands, but every thing it forbids? Such are the reproaches which you may expect from your faith; and after such reproaches, reproaches so founded as to preclude subterfuge, what can you look for but judgment without mercy?

And now, beloved hearers, I shall dismiss you with a reflection which cannot take up your thoughts too much. It must needs be that my faith save me, or that my faith damn me. There is no medium. If my faith be not the origin of my justification, it will infallibly be the cause of my reprobation. It depends upon myself to make it the means of my salvation, because it depends upon myself to make use of it in the manner in which I ought, and which God requires. But if it should not, through my own fault, be the means of my salvation, or if I should render such means unprofitable, it is out of my power to hinder it from being the means of my damnation, because it is a talent put into my hands by God himself, a talent for which I am accountable to him, and which I am bound to turn to the advantage he expected. It would, therefore, be a great and fatal mistake, to class my faith with indifferent things, which can do no harm when they do no good. If my faith bring me not to the supreme good, it will plunge me into the greatest of all evils. It lies at my option to take which I please; but I must of necessity choose this or that. What do I say? Is there room to deliberate? Can I hesitate a moment, inasmuch as to fence against a woful eternity, and to gain the fruition of a sovereign felicity, is the point in question?

Ah! Christians, let us often ruminate on the heavy charges which faith will bring against us, and the galling reproaches with

which it will load us, before God's tribunal. Scarce do we now bestow a thought upon them; but so soon as the pageantry of the world shall vanish, and faith stand forth in opposition to us, in the presence of God, what answer shall we make? For this crisis, beloved hearers, we should make preparation every day of our life. It will cost you, it is true, some trouble, some subjection, some violence, some efforts; but a temporal constraint is much more eligible, than to run the risk of never-ending woes. For, allow me to repeat what I cannot explain with too much minuteness, nor you can hear with too great attention: if ever you be lost, it is faith that will administer your greatest torment. No longer shall you enjoy the glorious benefit of this supernatural and divine faith, which is one of the most precious gifts of heaven. Of that favour will God divest you. But you will still have the remembrance and character of it, and the knowledge which it used to communicate to you; and all this will be your greatest punishment. I say, you will have the remembrance of the faith that taught you such solid truths, which you despised; that gave you such sacred rules of conduct, which you did not put in practice; that promised you such great and everlasting rewards, which you neglected to merit: and this remembrance will give you greater anguish than all the fire of hell together. You will wear the character of this faith, that is, the character of baptism, which will be a sign for the ministers of God's justice, the infernal spirits, thereby to discern you, among myriads of the reprobate, and to exercise over you, with greater violence, the fulness of their rage. You will still have the knowledge which this faith gave you; and that knowledge will make up for the deficiency of this faith: insomuch that you will believe as the devils believe; that you will tremble like them, and despair like them, that for you, as for them, your belief will be the cause of your eternal shame.

It were, therefore, more desirable to have never had faith. Yes, my brethren, it were more advantageous to have never had faith, than to have profaned and tarnished it by a criminal life. But even to do that will be out of your power; for, it will, in spite of you, be eternally true, that you had been a Christian; and you will be forced, eternally, to undergo punishment, for having been one nominally and theoretically only, devoid of morals, and without good works.

But in order to prevent this stinging reproach, and this dreadful

chastisement, you ask: to what resolution must we come? To none other than to keep the faith, and to live conformably to its documents. It instructs us in things repugnant to the senses; but we must submit to them. It tells us that the world is our greatest enemy; let us, therefore, shun it. It lays on us an obligation of hating and denying ourselves; let us labour to acquire this self-denial, and put it in practice, as much as is needful. It commands us to mortify the flesh by the spirit, and to curb its desires; let us generously and constantly struggle against it. It warns us to be humble in the height of greatness, to be poor in affluence, to be mortified in the midst of ease and conveniencies; let us use our endeavours toward carrying all this into execution. In the assistance of grace, and in the motives of faith, we shall find wherewithal to animate and strengthen us, and make all things easy to us Let us beg this assistance of God with confidence, and he will grant it liberally. Let us place these motives continually before our eyes, and they will ever uphold us. Then shall we deserve to hear from the mouth of our Lord and Saviour, the words addressed to the centurion in the gospel: "As thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee." The talent with which I entrusted you, you have turned to good account, and have made your faith active, and productive of good works: come, and enjoy your reward. You have walked in the path which it pointed out to you, with steadiness and perseverance: come, and take possession of my heavenly kingdom, to which it invited you, and in which you shall enjoy everlasting felicity.

SERMON VII.

ON THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

"*Certain of the Scribes and of the Pharisees answered him, saying: Master, we would see a sign from thee. Who answering, said to them: An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall be no sign given them, but the sign of the prophet Jonas.*" MATT. xii.

IT was curiosity, but a presumptuous, a captious, a malignant curiosity, that prompted the Pharisees to put this question to the Saviour of the world. A presumptuous curiosity, as, instead of prevailing with the Son of God, by an humble supplication, to grant as a favour that which they petitioned, they seem to insist upon it, as if showing their desire gave them a right sufficient to obtain their will: "Master, we would." A captious curiosity, as by what we read in another gospel, they proposed this question with a view to tempt him, and lay a snare in his way: "Others tempting him, sought of him a sign from heaven." Luke xi. A malignant curiosity, as their sole design was thereby to ruin him, being determined to turn even his miracles against him, for which they impeached him as for so many crimes, and which at last they made use of, in order to load him with calumnies, and crush him. For, hence it is, that our blessed Saviour made answer with a zeal full of wisdom on one hand, and indignation on the other; that he satisfied their curiosity, only to reproach them, at the same time, with their hardness of belief; that he treated them as an evil and adulterous generation; in fine, that he cited them to the bar of heaven, because he foresaw that the prodigy which he should show them, but to which they would pay no manner of regard, would but serve to embarrass them: "The men of Nineve shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it." Matt. xii.

This, beloved hearers, is the whole purport of that passage from which my text is taken; and this example of that hypocritical set

of people, is nothing more than what daily happens between God and ourselves.

My meaning is this: we want that God would make us see miracles, to confirm us in the faith; and he shows us such as we profit not by, such as we are utterly insensible to: miracles, which render, by the use we make of them, our hardness of heart the more criminal, as they are voluntary, and proceed, like that of the Pharisees, from the perversity of our own will, and the corruption of our own hearts. Now this is that which our Divine Master condemns in these supposed freethinkers of Judaism; and for this he will likewise condemn us, if we fall into the like track of infidelity.

I find in Tertullian a noble saying, and perfectly characteristic of the Christian profession: "That since the promulgation of the evangelical law, curiosity is impertinent, and can, for the future, be of no utility; much less can it be necessary, as nothing remains but to believe in the word, and submit our reason to the dictates of faith." Thus he explains himself. But for my part, Christians, I am bold enough to carry it still farther, and to add, that though it were allowable in the Christian religion to make new researches, and to argue upon topics relating to faith, and upon the mysteries it reveals, we should find in Jesus Christ, and in his holy gospel, not only wherewithal to convince our understanding, but to satisfy our curiosity in every manner. The reason is, that Christ our Lord hath shown us in his person such shining prodigies, which display such evidence, that no reasonable mind can question them; and because, if we be not affected with them, it must arise only from our ill disposition, for which we shall answer, and which will draw down upon us all the rigour of God's judgment.

This, beloved Christians, is the important matter I purpose to speak to in this discourse. Give me leave to address myself to the divine Spirit, most humbly beseeching him, that through the intercession of the Mother of God, he would deign to grant me the necessary knowledge and illumination.

It was not without reason, that the Pharisees, with a view of finding out if Christ were the Son of God, desired of him a prodigy which should come from himself: "Master, we would see a sign from thee." For, it must be allowed (as St. Augustin observes) that there are two different kinds of prodigies. Some come from God, others from man. Some raise admiration, being visible testimonies of the absolute power and will of the Creator;

others cause horror, being the melancholy effects of the viciousness of the creature. Those we revere, and denominate miracles; these we deem monsters, in the order of grace. Let us see a prodigy (say the Pharisees to Jesus) which comes from yourself. But what doth this adorable Saviour do? Be attentive, I pray you; for herein is placed the ground-work on which this instruction is raised. Of these two different kinds of prodigies, thus distinguished, he lets them see one, which could proceed only from the God of heaven, an evident miracle, the faith of the Ninevites converted by the preaching of the prophet Jonas; but at the same time lays another before them, of an opposite nature, which could not originate but in themselves; the prodigy of their infidelity. Now, beloved hearers, we need but contemplate these two sorts of prodigies, in order to see ourselves in the persons of the Pharisees, and oblige ourselves, by taking a comparative view of our own state with theirs, to grant that, perhaps, the reproach of our Saviour is not less suitable to ourselves, than to these false teachers of the law; that in the same sense in which he understood it, we are not, perhaps, less an evil and adulterous generation than they were; and that he might, with equal reason, summon us to appear at that tremendous bar, to which he cited them in these words: "The men of Nineve shall rise up in judgment with this generation." For I maintain, (and in two propositions I shall give you the division of this discourse;) I say, I maintain, first, that Jesus Christ in the establishment of his religion, hath shown us a more authentic and convincing miracle, than the conversion of the Ninevites, and that miracle is, the conversion of the world, and the propagation of the gospel. Secondly, that day after day, we oppose to this miracle a prodigy of infidelity, much more monstrous, and much more culpable, than that of the Pharisees.

Both these are prodigies: the one supernatural and wholly divine, and that is the conversion and sanctification of the world by the preaching of the gospel; the other but too natural and too human, but nevertheless a prodigy, and that is our infidelity. Both these import a right of condemnation, which God, in his judgment, will produce against us, if we be at no pains to prevent it by passing judgment on ourselves from this very moment. A miracle of faith, a prodigy of infidelity. A miracle of faith, which God hath made plain and obvious to us, and hath placed continually before our eyes; a prodigy of infidelity, from which to pre-

serve yourselves you take no care, but which, on the contrary, you cherish in your hearts. A miracle of faith, which will cause in your breasts a kindly shame, by displaying the excellency and grandeur of your religion; a prodigy of infidelity, which, after being the source of your present depravation, will perhaps be the cause of your eternal reprobation. Both the one and the other require and deserve particular attention.

PART I. In order, therefore, beloved Christians, to enter into the spirit of our Saviour's words, and to touch the point which I am going to enlarge upon, we must thoroughly comprehend this mighty miracle of the conversion of the world, and establishment of Christianity; which I look upon (with St. Jerom) as the miracle of faith. And because it is indubitable, that this miracle will be one of the most invincible proofs which God (if ever we should be reprobated) will make use of against us; you and I must, this day, form a just idea of it, capable to awaken the most lively sentiments of religion in our hearts. It is a great subject, I own; it hath exhausted the eloquence of the fathers of the church, and exceeded the extent of the human understanding. But let us adhere to the simple and unadorned exposition which St. Chrysostom hath made of it in one of his homilies: and that we may the better comprehend the truth of this matter, let us form our judgment by that which he hath represented as the type, or figure of it; I mean the conversion of the people of Nineve, and the prodigious and miraculous effects resulting from the preaching of Jonas; and thus I proceed:

Jonas, a fugitive, but, for all his flight, unable to flee from the power and will of God, who sends him, overwhelmed with shame, and touched with repentance, receives, on the part of the Lord, a fresh order to repair to Nineve. He goes. Though a foreigner and unknown, he preaches, and declares that he is sent by God. This great city, and all its inhabitants, he threatens with a total and impending destruction. No more time allowed than forty days; no other proof to ascertain his prediction than his very prediction: and this people, abandoned to vices of every kind; this people, who seemingly disregarded both God and law; this people, refractory to the remonstrances and documents of all the other prophets, relying on his word, and changed by the Almighty hand of the Most High, hearken to him with respect, enter into themselves, endeavour to appease the wrath of God, perform the most austere

and exemplary penance. Neither age, nor sex, nor estate, is excepted. The king himself (says the inspired historian) comes down from the throne, to weep and humble himself. The children are comprised in the law of fasting, enacted by the prince. Every one girded with rough hair-cloth, and sprinkled with ashes, shows signs of a speedy and efficacious sorrow. In fine, so complete is the reformation of manners, that the prophecy is fulfilled to the letter, "and Nineve is overturned," (as according to an apposite thought of St. Chrysostom,) it is no longer that abandoned and dissolute Nineve, which was held by God in so great abomination; but a new and holy Nineve, raised by the ministry of a single man on the ruins of the other, a man replenished with the Spirit of God, who sanctified and rent the hearts of thousands. This (says our Saviour to the incredulous Jews) is the miracle which will condemn and confound your impenitence. And I say to every Christian who is hardened in his libertine ways: this is the miracle which the divine Spirit proposes as the figure of another more astonishing, more beyond the power and reach of man, more capable to work a conviction in our hearts, and lift them up to God. Give ear attentively, and without prejudice, to what I shall advance, and you will readily grant it.

The miracle performed by the preaching of Jonas, was a sign for the Jews; but here is for you another, which I look upon as the miracle of Christianity. Happy should I be, should I be able to engrave it deeply in your minds! I mean the conversion, not of one town or province, but of the whole world, by the preaching of the gospel, and by the mission of a greater man than Jonas, a God-man, Christ Jesus: "And behold a greater than Jonas here." Matt. xii. Let us drop the consideration of his Godhead for a moment. We examine not at present what he is, but what he did. To be brief, Christians, he did what we never can sufficiently comprehend, but what we for ever should seriously consider. Give me grace, O Lord, to display this matter in the strongest light, by a recital as affecting, as exact and faithful!

Jesus, the son of Mary, and the reputed son of Joseph, whom the Jews regarded as the son of a mechanic, "Is not this the carpenter's son?" (Matt. xiii.;) undertakes to make a change throughout the universe, and to substitute for idolatry, superstition and error, the pure worship of the living God. A design worthy of him; a vast an immense design, the success of which I shall lay before you.

For this end, of whom did he make choice? Of twelve unpolished, ignorant, weak, unaccomplished disciples, but so filled with his Spirit, that in a day, in a moment, he endows them with all the necessary qualifications for this great work. In fact, these men, so unrefined, (or to use his own expression,) so slow of heart to believe, by the virtue of the Spirit which he sends them from heaven, are fired with zeal, and replenished with faith. These fishermen, these weak men, who were looked upon (says St. Paul) "as the refuse of the world, the off-scouring of all;" (1 Cor. iv.;) well stored with the grace peculiar to their apostleship, share among them the conquest and reformation of the world. Their only arms are patience, their only treasure poverty, their only counsel simplicity; and yet everything yields to them. They preach mysteries incredible to the human understanding, and they are believed. They declare a gospel diametrically opposite to man's inclinations, and it is received. They declare it to the great, to the learned, to the wise of this world, and submission is paid to it. The great receive the law from the poor, the learned are convinced by the ignorant, the voluptuous and the sensual are instructed by these new preachers of the cross, and undergo the burden of mortification and penance. Of all these, is formed a body of Christians, so holy, so pure, so distinguished for virtues of every kind, that paganism itself is unable to refrain from paying them a tribute of admiration.

This is not all: and what I have to add, methinks, should appear still more surprising. For, the Christian faith is scarcely promulgated by the twelve apostles, and spreads its influence, but it feels the iron rod of persecution from a thousand enemies. All the powers of the earth rise up against it. Dioclesian, the mighty master of the world, makes a politic point of reducing it to nothing. But in spite of his efforts, and the violence of so many other persecutors of the Christian name, the faith is established, unshaken and immoveable, on a solid basis. Thousands of martyrs stand forth, and defend it by the effusion of their blood. People of all ranks value themselves on becoming victims to it, and on immolating themselves for it. Innumerable virgins bear to it the same testimony, and suffer in their tender and delicate bodies, with joy, the most cruel and excruciating torments. It spreads, it multiplies not only in Judea, where it took its rise, but to the extremity of the earth, where, in the days of St. Jerom, (it is he who remarks

it as a kind of prodigy,) the name of Jesus Christ was revered and adored, not only among barbarians, but civilized nations; at Rome, where the religion of a crucified God, in a short time, is the established religion; in the palaces of emperors, where God, with a view to settle his church, raises fervent Christians in the midst of iniquity; in short, (and take special notice of this,) in the most enlightened of all ages, in the age of Augustus, which the Lord made choice of to display the more conspicuously the character of his law, a law, which was destined to overthrow, alone, all the wisdom of man, and all the pride of reason.

Let us own, (with St. Chrysostom,) beloved hearers, that though the Christian religion had met with, in the world, all the necessary favour and support from its infancy; though it had commenced without storm, persecution, or distress; yet a thousand other indications and circumstances evidently demonstrate it to be the work of God. But that it should be established in persecutions, or rather by persecutions; that it should never have been more flourishing, than when most violently attacked; that the blood of its propagators (as one of the fathers of the church expresses it) should be the source of fruitfulness; that the greater its losses were by fire and faggot, the greater should be its acquisitions by the gospel ministry; that the cruelty exercised against some proselytes, should be a powerful attraction in the call of others; that by the sufferings, death, and resignation of its members, this body of Christians should have so great, so speedy, so marvellous an increase, is one of those prodigies, beloved brethren, at which human wisdom must acknowledge the narrowness of its own limits, and pay lowly homage to the power of the Deity. This is a wonderful, a subsisting fact, a fact that displays itself before our eyes, and to which we bear witness. For, in spite of hell, we see the world become Christian, and submitted to the worship of the God-man, at whom the Jews are scandalized, and the Gentiles scoff: "This is the Lord's doing, and it is wonderful in our eyes." Ps. cxvii.

And to the intent that we may be impressed with a stronger idea of this wonder, the same heavenly Lord hath renewed it in these latter ages of the church. You know that full well. Francis Xavier, alone, and unattended by ought but the word, and the doctrine he preached, converted in the east an entire new world. They were pagans and idolaters, and he formed them to the same holiness of life and manners, inspired them with the same ardour

for martyrdom, and made appear in them whatever appeared the most heroical and most striking in ancient Christianism, so perfect and so venerable. And how did he compass it? By the same means, (notwithstanding the same obstacles,) with the same success. As if God had taken pleasure in exhibiting, once more, in this renowned successor of the apostles, what his omnipotent hand had operated by the ministry of the apostles themselves; and had been willing to give us, by these examples, fresh credentials for all that we have heard of past ages.

Now, I hold, beloved hearers, that after this, we have no right to ask miracles of God; and that we outgo, in incredulity, the Pharisees themselves, if we have, like them, the presumption to say, "We would see a sign." The reason is, that the conversion of the world, such as I have described it, however imperfectly, is, beyond all doubt, a perpetual miracle. Whereupon there are three reflections to be made, or three circumstances to be remarked. A miracle, which surpasses all other miracles; a miracle, which presupposes all other miracles; a miracle, which verifies, in the order of Providence, all other miracles. And by a melancholy, but yet inevitable consequence, a miracle, which, if it becomes not a means of our instruction and conversion, must make us deserving of God's chastisements. My God! that I am not endowed with one of those tongues of fire, which descended from heaven on the twelve deputed to propagate your word, and that my breast is not filled with the same spirit that actuated theirs, in order to impress so sublime a truth on the hearts of all!

Yes, Christians, the conversion of the world is a perpetual miracle, which infidelity will never be able to destroy. In this light it was always considered by all the fathers of the church, particularly St. Augustin, whose judgment, in this place, we may make, without danger, the rule of our own. For that great man shut the mouths of the pagans by this way of reasoning: "Since you are so opinionated as to refuse credit upon any authority to the other miracles, which for us are incontestible proofs of our faith, grant at least, therefore, that in your own system, there is one which you must admit, and that miracle is, the conversion of the world to the religion of Jesus without any miracle. For, things which are not, and which could never be, would be the miracle of miracles. And to what, therefore, (continues St. Augustin,) shall we attribute this work, the sanctification of the

world, if we have not recourse to the infinite virtue and power of God? The honour of it cannot be justly ascribed either to the strength and refinements of the human understanding, or to the bland insinuations and charms of eloquence. For although the apostles had been as renowned for eloquence and learning, as they really were otherwise, it is well known what human eloquence and learning are capable of; or, rather, it is but too well known how ineffectual both the one and the other are, when reformation of manners is the point in question. The example of Plato, who with all the credit and esteem which his philosophy had procured him in the world, could not prevail upon one town or village to live after his maxims, and be governed by his laws, demonstratively shows, that St. Peter proceeded upon principles infinitely more exalted, when he brought kingdoms and provinces under the obedience of the gospel.

The faith was not planted by force or violence; for, the first admonition which the disciples received from their Master, was, that "he sent them forth as lambs among wolves;" (Luke xix.;) and so well they understood it, that, without resistance, they let themselves be slaughtered like innocent victims. Mahometanism was established by conquests and arms; heresy, by rebellion against lawful power; the law alone of Jesus by patience and humility. It was neither the mildness of this law, nor the relaxation of morals, that occasioned its progress; for in this law, how reasonable soever, there is nothing but what is humiliating for the mind, and mortifying for the body. It is easy to conceive how paganism should spread in the world without miracles, as it countenanced the indulgence of all the passions, and authorised vices of every kind, and as nothing is more natural to the human heart than to close with these ways. But how is it conceivable, that a law which commands us to love our enemies, and to hate ourselves, should meet with so many, and such strenuous abettors? Caprice, in this, can have no share; for caprice, how blind soever it be, could never induce the heart of man to forego revenge, to renounce pleasures, and to crucify the flesh. The conclusion is evident: that a God only as powerful as ours, could so happily conduct, and crown with success, so great an undertaking; and that, therefore, Christ Jesus, the oracle of truth, had reason to infer, though he spake in its favour, that "it was the Lord's doing, and was wonderful in our eyes."

1st. I said that this miracle greatly surpassed all other miracles. And can it be called in question? If (according to the opinion of St. Gregory, pope,) the particular conversion of an inveterate sinner is of greater estimation in the presence of God, and, in that sense, is more miraculous than the resurrection of the dead, how shall we estimate the conversion of so many who were educated, and, as it were, engrafted in idolatry? But to make this comparison still more intelligible: there are in the world, nay, in the Christian world, men, at this day, devoid of religion. You know it well; atheists in belief, and in manners too; so confirmed in perversity, that all the miracles which have ever been wrought, would scarcely reclaim them. Perhaps your intercourse and connexions with them are but too frequent. How great an effect, therefore, of the Almighty's arm, and what a miracle was requisite to gain over to Christ, a number almost infinite, I do not say of such libertines, but of libertines more obstinate in a high degree, and more determined to impugn the grounds of conversion, whose change, nevertheless, hath been the glory and honour of the Christian religion! What would you say—(this will put my meaning in a clearer light, and will convince you of what I call a miracle that exceeds the very notion of a miracle)—what would you say, if, by virtue of the sacred word which I am preaching, some incredulous person, of whose return to God you despair for evermore, were converted in your presence; so that, renouncing his libertinism, he should declare himself openly, and all at once, and should actually begin to live like a Christian? What would you say, if, constantly inflexible for many years together, he withdrew from this audience, deeply penetrated with a holy compunction, and resolved to repair, by a holy repentance, the scandal of his deism? Could any miracle affect you more? Now I say that this miracle, which, perhaps, might affect you, but would certainly surprise you, is precisely that which hath a thousand and a thousand times been seen in the Christian world; and that one of the most ordinary triumphs of our religion hath been to subdue these haughty, obdurate, refractory spirits; to compel them to return into the way of the Lord, and to make them tractable, pliant, and submissive as tender babes; that it began by these means, and that, notwithstanding the united powers of darkness, even in these our days, it gives us illustrious examples, when it pleases the Lord, whose arm is not shortened, to lay open the treasures of his holy grace, and

therewith to replenish these vessels of mercy, whom he hath predestinated to enjoy his glory. Recent examples there are of this kind, which we have seen and admired. And oy this alone, do I not adduce a more cogent argument, than if I had entered into a long detail of so many miracles, which take up so much of our sacred histories, and we find are authorized by constant tradition?

2ndly. I added (and this appears still more convictive) that this miracle necessarily presupposes all other miracles. For, in short, (says St. Chrysostom, and after him St. Thomas, in his summa against the Gentiles, what could have induced the primitive Christians to embrace a law, odious, according to all worldly maxims, and repugnant to the dictates of flesh and blood? The apostate Julian reproached the apostles with levity and credulity, pretending that their attachment to the Son of God was not found in reason. But to judge in that manner (replies St. Chrysostom) must not one be equal in wickedness to Julian? For was it levity to follow, and adhere to a man, who, as a pledge of his promise, gave sight before their eyes, to "the blind from their birth," and restored to life "the dead of four days?" Being so mistrustful and selfish as they were, and as the gospel informs us, would they have quitted all to follow Christ, if they could in the least have supposed or suspected that his miracles were fictitious? How could they behold them, and not believe in him? After so shamefully abandoning him in his passion, after being scandalized in him so as to renounce him, would they have returned to the charge, and declared in his favour more openly than ever, if the miracle of his resurrection, so authentic and undeniable (as St. Jerom speaks,) had not now revived their fallen faith? Would they have gone with pleasure to dungeons and torments; have cheerfully undergone crucifixions and the lashes of scorpion whips, have been the confessors and martyrs of this glorious resurrection, if the strongest evidence of such a miracle had not dissipated all their doubts?

How was St. Paul transformed, in a moment, from a persecutor of the church to a preacher of the gospel? Could this miracle have been wrought without another? Would this man, so zealous a defender of the Jewish law, so passionately fond of the traditions of his fathers, ever have deserted them, to be the disciple of a sect, whose downfall and ruin he had undertaken, if God on a sudden had not thrown him on the ground, in his way to Damascus, filled him with dismay, and inspired his heart with new

sentiments? Did he not acknowledge, himself, in the synagogue, that he owed his conversion to the fear he was in of being rebellious to the light which surrounded him on all sides, and to the terrifying voice with which he was thunderstruck? "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" And did he not conceive from that very moment, an ardent desire of laying down his life, and of undergoing hardships of every kind for the glory of that Jesus whose enemy he had been? Was it simplicity? Was it prejudice? Was it worldly interest? But is it not certain, that St. Paul's disposition was entirely otherwise, and that breathing, nothing at that very time but blood and carnage, he could not be withdrawn from the ancient law, of which he was one of the principal pillars, nor brought over to the new, which he meant to destroy, by any other means, than the miraculous impulse, and divine effort, which struck him to the ground, and bore him away?

We read of St. Peter, not without astonishment, that the very first time he preached to the Jews, he converted to the faith, three thousand men. But what should surprise us? cries St. Augustin. They saw a poor fisherman, void till that time of every kind of knowledge, save that of his business, in a masterly manner explain the most sublime and abstruse mysteries of the kingdom of God, speak all sorts of languages, and make himself understood, at the same instant, to as many nations as a great ceremony had assembled from every corner of the world. This great miracle St. Luke hath related, and at a time, too, when he could not have had the effrontery to publish it, if it had not been true beyond all dispute, as he would have had against him, not one or two witnesses, but the whole earth; for, such an imposture would have lost him all credit, and would only have served to put down the religion of which he thereby designed to make known the excellence and holiness. Admitting, I say, the authenticity of this miracle, is it strange that so many Jews were converted? And it is not more surprising, that any there should be among them so blind, so perverse and headstrong, as to remain hardened in their incredulity?

It is with some difficulty we comprehend the extraordinary and almost innumerable miracles which St. Paul wrought among the Gentiles; but in preaching to the Gentiles, did he not, as the mark and seal of his apostleship, add illustrious miracles? Was not this the testimony he bore to them, himself, writing to the Corinthians, and beseeching them to call to mind the wonderful

works he had performed among them? If all these had been counterfeit miracles, would he have had the assurance to speak in this strain? Would he have appealed to themselves, and have called them to witness? Would he not have exposed, by such manifest forgery, his ministry to discredit, and have frustrated the plan which he meant to pursue?

What induced St. Augustin to adhere so closely to the Catholic church? Did he not confess that it was, in great part, the power of miracles? What needed he more than those which he had seen with his own eyes? Than the famous miracle which was wrought at Carthage in his own time, in the person of a Christian, suddenly and supernaturally restored to health, by the intercession of St. Stephen, at which this great saint protests he was present, and of which he hath left us, in his excellent book of the "City of God," an account? What though his faith had till then been wavering, would not this alone have been sufficient to corroborate and settle it for ever? Shall we say that St. Augustin was a weak man, and that he fancied he saw what he did not see? Shall we call him a cheat, who imposed upon the world by a fabulous narrative? But as neither supposition can be reasonably adopted, must we not conclude with Vicentius Liriensis, that as the miracles of our religion helped to convert the world, so the conversion of the world is one of the most infallible and strongest proofs of the miracles of our religion.

3rdly. And here, Christians, we cannot too much admire the wisdom of the great Creator, who doth not oblige us to believe in miracles which are above reason. For, in our regard, the conversion of the world, founded in so many other miracles, is an eternal miracle, a miracle which justifies all other miracles, of which it is only the consequence and effect. And for this reason, we may say to the Almighty, with Richard of St. Victor, "Lord, if we believe erroneously, we are deceived by you." Yes, my God, if we were in error, we should have a right to impute it to you; and however you be God, we might make you responsible for all our aberrations, because religion is raised on a foundation that could only have been laid by you; because this religion in which we live, to say nothing of its holiness and irreprehensible purity, is confirmed by miracles, which can be attributed to you, and to no other cause.

True, my brethren: but likewise these miracles will put us to

confusion at the judgment of God; and in a particular manner the mighty miracle of the conversion of the world to the faith of Christ Jesus. These pagans, these idolaters, enrolled among the faithful, will rise up against us, and will become our accusers: "The men of Nineve shall rise up in judgment." And what will they allege to our condemnation? Ah! Christians, what will they not allege? And what ought we not ourselves to allege against ourselves? Indeed, if we bring ourselves, in any degree, to a reasonable account, it must needs be, I do not say shameful, but terrible for us, in the presence of God, that this faith should have given rise, throughout the world, to such admirable virtue, and should now be among us so feeble and drowsy; that it should have produced, in corrupt paganism, so much godliness, and perhaps have as yet caused in us no change, no return to God, no renunciation of sinful practices. If our minds be illumined with the least ray of light, ought we not to tremble, to shudder at the thought, that this same faith hath been settled so successfully all over the earth, and is not as yet thoroughly settled in our hearts? We profess it in words, we give outward signs of it, we are Christians in all that concerns ceremony and external worship, but are we so in heart? And yet it is particularly in the heart that faith must fix her abode, in order to come forth and quicken our works.

W hat a galling reproach (if we have not stifled every sentiment which grace is wont to inspire) that faith hath surmounted all human power conspired against her, and hath not removed the insignificant obstacles that obstruct our conversion! For, what stops our progress? A foolish passion, a sordid lucre, a point of honour, a fleeting pleasure, difficulties magnified in the mirror of imagination, which our faith, though victorious, is unable to conquer. With how great reason should I own my fault, if I did but consider in the presence of God, and in the bitterness of my soul, that this same faith should stand her ground, and even gather strength, amidst bloody persecutions, and that I made her every day vail to trivial persecutions, which the world raises against her in my person: that is, to a word, to a jest, to a worldly consideration, or, rather, should I say, to my own weakness and pusillanimity? For here lies my guilt, here lies my shame. Had I but the courage to declare myself openly, and disregard the world, long since had I been addicted to the service of God. But inasmuch as I stand in awe of the world, and cannot resolve to

give it displeasure, I there stop short, and, against my inclination, keep my faith captive, and suffer her to languish in the bondage of sin.

Ah! my God, what answer shall I make when you show me that this faith, which disproved the errors of idolatry and superstition, could not rid my mind of I know not how many erroneous principles and maxims with which I am prepossessed? What shall I allege in my own behalf when you show me that this faith, which brought down and subjected the pride of the Cæsars to the humility of the cross, could not tear from my heart that worldly vanity, that secret ambition, that love of myself, which hath been my destruction? What, in short, shall I say to you, when you show me that this faith, which sanctified the world, could not sanctify a certain world within me, a world more pernicious than the great one that surrounds me? Shall I have wherewithal to sustain the weight of these accusations? Shall I throw it upon you, O Lord? Shall I arraign Faith? Shall I say that she made not sufficient impression, and that I wanted conviction to be sufficiently affected? Ah! Christians, perhaps our infidelity is risen to that pitch as to try to gain credit by this pretext. But this pretext it is that will make our guilt more palpable: for, the very infidelity into which we are fallen, God will place before us, as a prodigy we have opposed to the miracle of faith; a prodigy which comes not from God, but from ourselves, and which I am going to enlarge upon in the second part.

Part II. To be an infidel without ever having had any knowledge of the Christian religion, is a case, how dreadful and deplorable soever, in which there is nothing, if rightly considered, surprising or prodigious. Thus (says St. Chrysostom) infidelity in a pagan may be blindness of mind, a criminal blindness; but it cannot at all times be said that this blindness, though criminal, is a prodigy. To conceive, therefore, rightly the prodigy of infidelity, we must imagine it in a Christian, who, according to the various irregularities into which he hath fallen, either renounces his faith, or corrupts his faith, or belies and contradicts his faith; renounces his faith, by a licentiousness of belief, which makes him refuse to submit his understanding, and which fixes in his mind by little and little; corrupts his faith, by a secret, or over attachment to heterodox opinions that impugn it, and destroy its unity, purity, and integrity; belies and contradicts his faith, by irregular manners and

a vicious life, which bring upon it dishonour, reproach and scandal. Three deviations these from rectitude, which in a perverted Christian have something I know not how monstrous in them, and which I call, on that account, not merely irregularities, but prodigies of irregularity. Three situations these in religion, in which to consider only what may, and what ought to pass for an evident prodigy, man affords the Deity unquestionable reason for his condemnation. Bend all your mind to these three reflections.

1st. To begin with that which is most scandalous, the licentiousness of belief, which grows upon them into custom, and the nature of which is to renounce the faith. Is it not astonishing, beloved Christians, that persons brought up in the centre of Christianity, persons who prize themselves, in other respects, for the extent of their capacity, and the prudence of their conduct, should lay aside all religion, and inwardly withdraw from the precepts of faith, without any possibility of assigning one reason, I do not say absolutely solid and convincing, but even capable to satisfy their own understandings? Is it not inconceivable, that, without examination, without knowledge of the matter, through warmth of temper, through passion, through levity, through vain ostentation, shameful attachment to infamous pleasures, with less wisdom than thoughtless children, in an affair, too, of the greatest moment, an affair which regards their eternal lot, they should quit that faith, of which they have received the character by baptism, and in virtue of which they bear the name of Christian; that faith so necessary, supposing the truth of it, and to which they allow salvation is annexed; that faith, by which alone, as they are well apprised, they can hope to find grace, if there be any room for them to hope for grace; that faith, according to the quality of which they grant their eternity will hereafter be decreed, if ever they should hear the decrees of God? Can this be imagined? Such, however, is the woful disposition of almost all the libertines of the age. Observe, and you shall view them in this portrait.

Should any one among them, upon mature deliberation, after long application, all things considered, and weighed in as exact scales as possible, take up a resolution to relinquish the faith, I should deplore his misfortune, and should think it the most terrible vengeance which God could pour out upon him, as he never punishes, according to the scriptures, with greater severity, than when he permits the heart of man to fall into blindness: "Blind the heart

heart of this people." Isaiah vi. But still in all this there would be nothing prodigious. In his very blindness there would be some vestiges of candour and uprightness, which would make him pitiable, if not pardonable. But they whom I address (and in this number I comprehend almost all the freethinkers of these times, in the midst of whom, and with whom we live) are convinced sufficiently, that they did not arrive at the summit of libertinism by such means, and that their resolution to renounce the faith derived from motives of a different nature. And besides (give me leave to make this remark) how criminal and how inexcusable soever they may be, I can find them a resource and a kind of consolation, as men more easily return from libertinism founded in no principle, than from one which proceeds, by false reasoning, from a particular opinion, and a positive and consummate want of religion. But be that as it may, the kind of infidelity which I am now impugning, and which seems the most general, must own that it labours under this difficulty: that it is evidently rash, and destitute of proof. For, ask a libertine why he ceases to believe what he once believed, and you soon will find, that in what he alleges in his own defence, there is not the shadow or appearance of solidity. Ask him, whether by strength of reasoning he hath found a demonstration against the infallible revelation to which he had submitted. Oblige him to tell you with frankness, if ever he examined the matter: if ever he sought the truth with a candid and pure intention, and took proper measures to come to the knowledge of it; if ever he communed with, and consulted persons capable to undeceive him, and resolve his doubts; if ever he read what the fathers have written upon religious topics, which he cannot relish, because he doth not understand them, nor makes it his business to weigh their arguments; if ever he seriously attempted to dive to the bottom of difficulties; in a word, if he always did all those things which every judicious and prudent man, in the like conjuncture, ought to do, in order to receive instruction, and clear up these points. Let him be interrogated upon each particular, and let him give you his answer without reserve. He will own that he never took so much pains, nor made so much inquiry. All this, however, he ought to have done, before he ventured to take so bold, so dangerous a step, as that of withdrawing from obedience to the faith. And yet, Christians, he withdrew from it, and withdrew, too, at a much more easy and compendious rate. He took the resolution, at the

risk of whatever might be the consequence, to believe no longer, without conviction, nay, without reflection; without ascertainment, or any fixed rule, how far to proceed in the dreadful gulf into which he plunged. This I call a prodigy: and tell me, is it not every day accomplished in numberless worldlings?

But you will object: as this libertinism results not from reason, by what other means can a Christian be perverted to that degree as to become an unbeliever? Ah! beloved hearers, I say it again, his perversion arises from a thousand circumstances, directly contrary to a wise conduct and the rules of prudence, but which I take to be the greater prodigies, as they run counter to and clash with reason. A prodigy of infidelity: he renounces his faith—and (and here I shall adduce no proof but that of your own experience, your own knowledge of the world) he renounces his faith through a spirit of singularity, to have the ridiculous advantage and satisfaction of thinking differently from other men, of saying what no one ever said before, of contradicting what all the world allows; to represent a religion to himself as he lists, a God after his mind, a Providence just such as he would have it to be: forming chimerical systems, which he raises up or pulls down, according as the present humour affects him; following blindly his extravagant ideas, and thereby not well knowing either what he believes, or believes not; rejecting to-day what he yesterday maintained, and perpetually, in the view of opposing God, at cross-purposes with his own understanding. A prodigy of infidelity: he renounces his faith through a sentiment of pride, fantastic pride, disdaining to submit his short-sighted reason to the word of God, though he deem it a virtue, and even finds it necessary, to submit it every day to the words of men: confessing, in many temporal affairs, that he stands in need of being governed by another, but vainly pretending, that in his researches for eternal truths, he is clear-sighted enough to regulate his conduct; humbly acknowledging his insufficiency relatively to the least secrets of nature, and boldly deciding in whatever regards the mysteries of God. A prodigy of infidelity: he renounces his faith from the joint motives of convenience and despair, because it importunes him, interrupts his pleasures, thwarts his designs, upbraids him with injustice, and is the only means by which he can deaden the stings and remorses that gall his heart. He chooses to be destitute of all faith, rather than be actuated by a faith that would incessantly censure and con-

demn him; and by a strange depravation of reason, which is always consequent to sinful courses, he believes things to be not what they are, but what he could wish them, and what he imagines it his interest they should be; as if it depended on him that they should be either one thing or the other, and that truth and falsehood were to be determined by his affection. He renounces his faith through prejudice, valuing himself upon this, that he is not prepossessed with regard to all other things, though particularly so in religious matters; taking no offence at the empty figments and paradoxical opinions of a wild, presumptuous, new-fangled philosophy, and naturally disposed to scrutinize and censure, with critical nicety, the decisions of the church; apprehending perpetually too great credulity, and never apprehending too little belief; alleging, to exculpate himself on this head, that simplicity is weakness, and not wiping off the imputation arising from a still greater weakness, wilfulness; in a word, avoiding, as narrowness of mind, what would be equity with regard to faith, and taking that for clearness and strength of understanding, which I denominate obstinacy against faith. For, not to expatiate on other kinds of libertinism, analogous to this, from what I have said, you may conceive how libertinism makes daily progress, and how faith loses ground.

The libertine not only abandons his faith, but, what should appear to you still more strange, he abandons it against reason, and in spite of reason; and whereas, according to the sacred history, the merit of Abraham consisted in believing even against faith, and in hoping even against hope, the freethinker's crime is to be an infidel even against reason, and a deserter of the faith even against prudence. For, the faith which we profess is grounded upon motives, which, considered separately, might well hold the place of a weighty reason; but which, united, and taken all collectively, irrefragably demonstrate that they have something in them exalted and divine. And, in reality, they have appeared to be forcible, as to affect and convince the chief personages of the world. What doth the libertine do? He steels his breast, and makes open opposition to all these motives. To instance only in that which I choose for the groundwork of this discourse, and which is drawn from miracles. He is told that God confirmed our faith by illustrious miracles. The falsity, however, of these miracles, and the want of veracity in all those witnesses who report them, and declare

they give ocular testimony, he undertakes to prove. And as there are some, among these miracles, that are evident and incontestible, of which only I speak, and to which all preachers ought solely to adhere; miracles of the first and highest order, on which Christianity is essentially founded; miracles acknowledged by the very enemies of the Christian faith, verified by all the proofs that render facts authentic, and which cannot be contradicted, without having recourse to untenable suppositions; (for example—that the evangelists were impostors and madmen: impostors, who agreed to lead us into error, and madmen, who, in order to support their imposture, delivered themselves up to the most cruel torments: that St. Paul imagined falsely he was struck from heaven, and cast upon the ground in his way to Damascus; and that he knavishly imposed upon, or rather that he jeered, the people of Corinth, when he bade them call to mind the miraculous deeds he had wrought in their presence: that St. Augustin must be a man of mean understanding, to let himself, like others, be borne away by the tide of popular error, when he imagined, and protested he had seen at Carthage that which in reality he had not seen)—as there are, I say, miracles of this nature, and as the libertine is unable to elude the force of them, otherwise than by such extravagant notions, he gives them admission, however extravagant; he adopts them, and that which he would blush to say, he blushes not to think, and boldly gives the lie to what is most holy and venerable in antiquity. Now, is anything more deserving of the name of prodigy? O my God, is it then true, that impiety can pervert the heart of man to so great a degree, and involve it, by estranging it from you and your ways, in such horrible darkness?

I should never have done, should I try to pursue so ample a subject through all its parts, and discuss it minutely in its full extent. I shall, therefore, say only a word or two of the second prodigy: that is, of the corruption of faith by a secret concurrence, or even public adherence, to the opposite errors, particularly heresy.

2ndly. Tertullian confesses it was beyond his power, whenever he attempted it, to find out the depth of this abyss, and fathom the unmeasurable judgment of God. And yet I affirm, that in this abyss certain irregularities were not perceptible in the days of Tertullian, which have been so glaring in these later ages. For, without attempting to analyze heresy, which the fathers have regarded as a monster composed of whatever an ungovernable and

perverse mind is capable of producing, suffice it at present to borrow the great reflection of a great cardinal: to wit, that among so many, who, of late years, have corrupted the purity and integrity of their faith, few there are, whose sincerity and uprightness will plead their excuse, I don't say before God, but even before men; and consequently whose apostacy was not a kind of prodigy. I should need no more than to set forth the heresy of the last century, and what story relates of it. I should need no more than to point out Catholics without number, who, following the crowd, and carried away with the torrent, declared publicly for Calvin's sect, some without knowing, or being at any pains to clear up difficulties and controverted points; others, perhaps positively, convinced and assured of its erroneous principles. How many of them abhorred the doctrine of that heresiarch concerning reprobation, yet listed under his banners, and were his zealous partizans? But if it should be urged: why then did they adhere to him? Why! Another prodigy this, Christians, and equally surprising. I should give for answer, and the testimony of history would make good the assertion, that in this procedure they were influenced by scandalous and unjust motives: some by vexation, and hatred to the church, and a general spirit of opposition to her sentiments; persons, who in the days of Arius would infallibly have heen Arians, and in the time of Pelagius would certainly have been Pelagians: others by a particular spleen and antipathy, impugning the truth for no other reason, than because such truths were held by their enemies; and determined to defend it, if their supposed enemies had undertaken to impugn it: some by interest, others by a factious spirit; some by curiosity, and to be thought of consequence; others by a wretched ambition to be seen at the head of a party: the great, by policy, making it a reason of state; the vulgar, by necessity, as they depended on the great: the women, by a sordid desire of appearing learned and penetrating; the men, by a complaisance for them still more fond, so as to regulate, by such caprice, their religious observances: the little wits, by hopes of gaining the reputation attached to novelty; the men of genius by fear of incurring the ill-will, and of being exposed to the shafts and malice of innovators. Friends were drawn in by friends, and neighbours wrought upon by neighbours. The populace were induced by no other reason than the general prevalence, and because all the world went that way. Every one was directed by the impulse of passion.

Are not these prodigies, nay, prodigies capable of staggering our faith, if the prediction of the apostle, in so dangerous a temptation, had not dissipated our fears, by warning us not only that all these things would in time come to pass, but that they were necessary for the separating of the elect of God from the reprobate: "There must be heretics, that they who are approved may be made manifest among you." 1 Cor. xi.

3rdly. But not to insist any longer on this, let us conclude, Christians, with the last prodigy, which concerns ourselves, and which is neither a renouncing to faith, nor a corruption of faith, but a dreadful contrariety between our life and our faith. My meaning is this: we are Christians by profession, and live like pagans; we have faith in theory, and in practice our conduct is nothing but infidelity; we have one mode of belief, and another of action. In every other respect, our actions and affections are conformable to our opinions and knowledge of things; for we love and hate, we shun and seek, we undergo and undertake, according to the insight we have into them. In nothing but what concerns the salvation of our souls do we act perversely. We shun what we judge is our sovereign good, and we seek what we judge is our sovereign evil. We profane the thing which we know to be adorable, and idolize that which we heartily despise. We abhor what would save us, and cherish what destroys us. Were we real, and not merely nominal Christians, and lived agreeably to the faith we profess, our life, it is true, would be a continual miracle, but yet in that there would be nothing prodigious. Were we pagans by profession, and destitute of faith, and lived in conformity to the flesh and the senses, however lost we might be to all hope, in such irregularity there would be nothing unnatural. But the prodigy is, that we want no faith, yet live like infidels; a prodigy which the faithless will not admit, ridiculously pretending that life and creed have an interchange of influence, and that we live as we believe, and believe as we live, in order to attribute their irregular demeanour to their want of conviction, and not to the perverse disposition of their hearts. But to remove this error would be no hard matter, as to possess faith, and to act against it, is not more difficult than to possess reason, and to act against it. Now, is not this, by their own confession, what they do every day?

Ah! Christians, let us stop the progress of these prodigies. Let us be consistent with ourselves. Let our morals and our faith

keep equal pace. Otherwise what have we not to fear on account of this faith so profaned, this faith so scandalized, this faith so dishonoured? Let us make it instrumental to a sincere repentance, if we have forsaken its ways. Let us make it instrumental to our perseverance, if we are already penitent, or have never swerved from our pious resolutions. Let us go on with the help of these divine lights, and let us not put them out by delivering ourselves up to our blind passions, and carnal appetites; for, nothing more exposes us to lose the faith, than the indulging in a sensual and voluptuous life. By these means it was, that thousands of reprobates lost it; and by these means it is, that they still persist in their libertine ways. Ah! my Lord, you have many chastisements in the treasures of your justice, by which you may inflict due punishment for our trespasses. Strike, my God! and if in your wisdom you should find it necessary to afflict us with all temporal calamities, pour your vengeance on our heads; but preserve our faith. Nor is this enough. Enliven and rouse this drooping faith, this expiring faith, nay, this faith dead without good works. In the same degree that it shall live in us, we shall live by it, and in the end it will lead us to everlasting life.

SERMON VIII.

For the Second Sunday in Lent; or for the Feast of the Transfiguration of our Lord, August 6.

ON THE LAW OF CHRIST.

"*While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud, which said: This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: Hear ye him.*" MAT. xvii.

THIS is the mystery, beloved Christians, of which the apostle speaks in his epistle to the Hebrews, where he tells them, that "God who at sundry times and in divers manners, spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son." Heb. i. It is in the transfiguration of our blessed Saviour, which is the subject of this day's gospel, that this declaration of St. Paul is palpably verified. God Almighty had given his law, of which the interpretation and pro-

mulgation were intrusted to Moses on Mount Sinai to mankind. In process of time he had raised up prophets to explain it to the people, to let them know the precepts of it, to expostulate with them on their having transgressed it, to make them yield submission to it, and induce them, partly by threats and partly by promises, to fulfil it. But neither Moses nor the prophets were more than forerunners to God-made man; and the law which they published, was only a disposition to the holy and new law, which the Redeemer of men was to bring into the world. It was upon that account he appeared between Moses and Elias—the one a lawgiver, the other a prophet, and appeared environed all round with light. I say, it was to teach us, that all the figures of the old law being now dissipated, and all the prophecies having received a full and perfect explanation, no one henceforward, except himself, deserves to be hearkened to, or can be our master. Wherefore, Christians, let us hearken effectually to this new lawgiver, and let us obey the voice of heaven, that tells us, "Hear ye him." In the view of inspiring you with this sentiment so just and so necessary, I purpose this discourse for your instruction on the Christian law.

When St. Paul says, that "it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe," (1 Cor. i.) we must not imagine, that the Christian law contains anything dissonant to true wisdom and right reason. For (as St. Jerom remarks) the same apostle, after having spoken in that manner, declares, nevertheless, that his ministry requires he should "speak wisdom among the perfect." Forasmuch as I hold, however unworthy, the same place which the great teacher of the Gentiles held, and I preach the same law which he preached to them, I have a right to tell you, beloved Christians, as he told them, that the evangelical law, of which I am speaking, is of all laws the most reasonable and most wise: this is my first proposition. I stop not there, but in order to engage your thoughts the more, I add further, that this so wise and so reasonable a law, is, at the same time, of all the laws, the most amiable and mild: this is my second proposition. Thus the law of Christ ought to be considered in two points of view; in respect to the head, and in respect to the heart. In respect to the head, it contains nothing undeserving of our esteem; in respect to the heart, it contains every thing deserving of our ve. In this manner I take upon me to encounter two false prin-

ciples which have been, at all times, adopted by the enemies of the Christian religion, in order to make it equally contemptible and invidious: contemptible, by making us believe that it clashes with good sense, and the rules of prudence; invidious, by representing it as a law too difficult, and destitute of unction. Now with these two errors it will be proper to contrast two characteristics of the gospel law—that of reason, and that of lenity.

That it is a law in the highest degree reasonable, you shall see in the first part.

That it is a law in the highest degree amiable, you shall see in the second.

These two important truths, I shall make the subject of your attention.

Part I. To consider things as they are in themselves, and as they regard that reasonable duty which subjects the creature to the Creator, we are not allowed to carp at, or scan, or critically examine the law which Jesus Christ brought down from heaven, and which he came, himself, to publish to the world. For since the legislators of this world have it in their power to enact laws without being responsible for what they do, and since their will and good pleasure are authority sufficient to issue out orders, without being accountable to the people for them, it is but just and reasonable that we grant the same privilege, and render the same homage, to him who is not only our legislator and Master, but our Saviour and God. It imports us, therefore, to submit to this law, and not subject it to our censure; to observe its dictates with a perfect fidelity, and not canvass it through a presumptuous curiosity.

Nevertheless, Christians, it hath so fallen out, that no law was ever more criticised, and, by a necessary consequence, more oppugned, or more condemned, than the law of Christ; and we may say that of it which the divine Spirit says, in Ecclesiastes, of the world in general, that, God, it should seem, by a particular providence, "gave the world over to their disputations." Eccles. iii. For, this law, quite holy and venerable as it is, hath been, if I may venture so to express myself, a standing problem in every age, since its first institution. The pagans, and, even in the Christian religion, libertines, led astray by the false light of worldly wisdom, have censured and condemned it, as too sublime, and beyond the reach of human ability: that is, affecting, as it were, an overstrained perfection, and beyond the limits prescribed by

reason. And, on the other hand, many among the heretics of old, borne away by prejudices conceived in their own imaginations, have objected to it, as too natural, and too human: that is, as leaving to man too great liberty, and not carrying far enough the strict and rigorous obligation of the precepts established therein. The former have accused it of indiscretion, the latter of remissness. Some (as St. Augustin reports) have complained, that it laid on its votaries a chimerical and senseless obligation of disengaging from the things of this world; and, others, intoxicated with a rash presumptuous spirit of reformation, have reproached it with using too much indulgence, and requiring too little. Now, beloved Christians, what think ye should I conclude from all this? Without diving farther into the matter, I should conclude, that therefore the Christian law is a just law, a law conformable to the universal rule of God's Spirit, inasmuch as it steers a middle course between these two extremes. For, whereas to deviate into the one, or the other, is an inherent characteristic of the spirit of man, and whereas the inherent characteristic of the Spirit of God (according to the maxims of St. Gregory, pope,) is a wise moderation, it follows, by a consequence almost infallible, that a law which men have dared to condemn, at the same time, of excess and deficiency, is exactly that which is perceived in the divine coalition of wisdom and reason, a coalition that makes it what the royal Psalmist denominates "the spotless law of the Lord."

And, indeed, (adds St. Augustin)—this is a very important remark—if the law of Jesus Christ had been perfectly calculated to the minds of the pagans, it would, as I may say, upon that very account, have ceased to be reasonable; and if libertines had approved of it, we ought to consider it as liable to suspicion, for that it would have pleased, and still would please, men of vicious hearts and corrupt morals. To be that which it ought to be, an irreproachable law, it is necessary that it should not coincide with their taste; and the very excess which they attributed to it is its justification. The same I say proportionably of heretical ringleaders, prepossessed with false zeal, and actuated by pride. These would have drawn into narrower limits a law already sufficiently contracted. They undertook to reform (as Vicentius Liriensis rightly observes) that by which they ought themselves to have been reformed; and it was necessary, that the law of Christ, lest it should be carried to a boundless severity, and that it might be circum-

scribed by a reasonable worship, by which it differs, and St. Paul distinguishes it from all others, should not be submitted to their notions, and that they should find deficiencies in it, to let us see that there was no deficiency in it.

If it were my province only to make an apology for the duties of Christianity, what I have now said might be deemed sufficient; and without saying more, I should think I had completely fulfilled my engagement. But I proceed farther, and it behoves me, Christians, as much as possible, to put you in a condition of paying, without contradiction or resistance, entire obedience to the divine Master whom the God of heaven commands us to hear: "This is my beloved son, hear ye him." It is proper you should be made to entertain an affection and attachment to his law; and to that intent I shall endeavour to give you a clear and comprehensive knowledge of it. Wherefore, I acknowledge that the law of Christ is holy and perfect; but I maintain, at the same time, that this *perfection* is not overstrained, as the spirit of the world is willing to insinuate. I acknowledge that it is moderate, holding the right mean between two extremes, and as such, proportioned to the weakness of man: but I maintain that in its *moderation* there is nothing improper, as the spirit of heresy would gladly persuade us. Now these two verities, rightly conceived, engage me efficaciously to practise this law; destroy all the prejudices which libertinism or self-love might frame in my mind against this law; determine me to live like a good Christian, because nothing appears to me more reasonable or upright than the institutes of this law. What a crowd of advantages, beloved Christians, for you and for me, were we thoroughly possessed with these sentiments!

1st. The law of Jesus Christ (says St. Chrysostom, treating of the same subject) is perfect indeed; but in such a manner, as not to give umbrage to human prudence the most delicate; and to reject it as a law carried too far, is to do it an injury, and be grossly ignorant of its intrinsic worth. Whether we consider the obligation it imposes on all states in general, or the rules it lays down for each in particular, it is ever impressed (if I may so speak) with the seal of supreme reason that directs it, and gives evident demonstration that it originates from the counsels of God himself. For (continues St. Chrysostom) what is there so singular in the Christian law, that sense the most refined ought not to approve of?

It obliges the Christian man to renounce himself, to mortify his spirit, to crucify his flesh; it requires that he stifle his irregular passions, forego his interest, bear affronts and ill usage without revenge, let his property be taken from him without reclaiming it; it commands him to do two things, to all appearance the most contradictory, or at least the most paradoxical, one to hate his kinsfolks and friends, the other to love his persecutors and foes; it declares it a crime for him to seek riches and greatness; a virtue to be humble; a beatitude to be poor; a cause of joy to be persecuted and afflicted: it prescribes rules for his thoughts and desires; it wills him on such and such occasions to pull out an eye, and cut off a hand; in a word, it reduces him even to the necessity of spilling his blood, and of suffering death, nay, the most cruel death, whenever the honour of his religion requires it, and the point is, to prove the reality of his faith. Now, beloved hearers, all this is reasonable, and so reasonable, that if the gospel-law did not require it, how interested soever I might be in the case, and how corrupted soever might be my heart, I should hardly be able to refrain from admiring the gospel-law. Let us come to particulars, and examine them separately.

It is reasonable that I renounce myself. Of this I can entertain no doubt, unless I am forgetful and quite ignorant of what I am. For since I am nothing, of myself, but vanity and falsehood; since whatever is in me that is good, is foreign, and not my own; since, of myself, and in my own nature, I am made up of wretchedness, intellectual darkness, passion, and irregularity, is it not consentaneous with sense and reason, that, seeing myself such, I should conceive an abhorrence of myself, and disengage from myself? And this is the interpretation of that great commandment of our blessed Saviour, "Let him deny himself." He doth not require that I give up my real interest, or the real charity which I owe myself, but inasmuch as there is a fictitious justice which I confound with the real; a fictitious charity which flatters and seduces me; a fictitious interest which dazzles and ruins me; and inasmuch as all this is precisely that which I call myself, he requires that, in order to get rid of all this, I get rid of myself, by renouncing myself.

It is reasonable that I mortify the flesh, because, otherwise, it would rebel against my reason, and against God himself; that I captivate my senses, because, otherwise, the liberty which I should

allow them, would lay me open to a thousand temptations; that I chastise my body and bring it into captivity, because otherwise, freed from the holy yoke of austerity, I should fall into a criminal and shameful effeminacy.

It is reasonable that I be forbid to take revenge; for, what would be the consequence, if every one were allowed to satisfy his resentments, and to what excess would a blind and precipitate passion lead us? It is reasonable not only that I forget injuries already received, but, moreover, that I be ready to undergo fresh ones; and that in a thousand conjunctures, in which the weakness of human nature would make me lose charity, if I obstinately persisted in supporting my pretensions, and claiming my right to the utmost extent of law and justice, I desist from my pretensions, and give up my claim. The reason is, that charity is a good of a superior order, and that I ought not to hazard it for any other; and that there is nothing which I ought not to sacrifice, in order to preserve divine grace, which is inseparably connected with the love of my neighbour. It is reasonable that this love of my neighbour extend to my very enemies the most mortal; since, to say nothing of that greatness of soul, that heroical and Christian greatness, which so nobly appears in the love of our enemy, and in the services we render him, we are taught by faith, that this man, though my enemy, is still my brother: and that I should myself, were I God's enemy, expect that he would, in his goodness, grant me mercy and grace. For, why should I not forgive, as I expect forgiveness from God for my offences? It is reasonable, which may seem at first view surprising, that I hate my friends, my relations, and even those to whom I owe my life, when those to whom I owe my life, or when those with whom I am united by all the ties of blood and friendship, are lets and hinderances to my salvation. For, reason then requires, that I keep away from them, that I shun them, that I abhor them: "If any one come to me, and hate not father and mother, he cannot be my disciple." Luke xiv. A saying (says St. Gregory) which doth not abolish the duty which children owe their parents, who, abusing the power they have over their children, act the part of devils, by leading them into the way of perdition. How then! (says Tertullian,) setting forth the propriety of this gospel maxim, the Roman soldiery, to be incorporated into the army, were obliged to make a kind of abjuration of father and mother to their com-

manders; and this severity of discipline was considered as just and necessary. If, therefore, Jesus Christ makes us yield obedience to the same law, in certain conjunctures, namely, when the attachment of a son to his father, of a wife to her husband, is incompatible with the interests of God, and the obedience due to him, can we say that too much is required of us?

But why pull out an eye? Why cut off a hand? Give the answer yourself, oh divine Saviour, and in one word satisfy human wisdom with respect to the harshness of this expression. It is, that it were better (says he) enter into life with one eye, or one hand, than be condemned eternally to the torment of fire: that day by day, to the shame of God's servants, a man of the world, through worldly wisdom, shall pull out an eye, shall cut off a hand, according to the meaning of our blessed Saviour; that is, shall tear himself from everything that is nearest and dearest to him, and withdraw himself from everything he loves the most tenderly, in order to avoid a scandal he apprehends may be hurtful to his fortune; that a woman of the world, whose conduct in life is still regulated by the dictates of reason, shall not hesitate a moment to break off an engagement, how tempting or profitable soever it may be, so soon as she finds it may bring the least stain upon her reputation. As though God had intended that the slaves of this world should dictate a lesson to the children of light; or rather, as though he meant it as an apology for that precept of the gospel, "If thy eye scandalize thee, pull it out."

This is not all. Why must our desires be considered as crimes, and a lascivious look be reckoned adultery? St. Jerom will inform you. The reason is, that we are not allowed to desire those things which it is not allowable for us to seek; and that any law which suffers desires to go unpunished, is an imperfect law, fitter to make hypocrites, than righteous men; because it is impossible to reform man, if his heart, in the first place, be not reformed. Why is a state so mean and abject as that of poverty, raised to a beatitude? "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Form your judgment of it by your own sentiments. The reason is, that involuntary poverty is as much despised, as voluntary poverty, of which Jesus Christ speaks, is respected. And, furthermore, experience clearly shows us, that none enjoy happiness in this world but the poor in spirit, as the ordinary spring of our vexation is, an eagerness for the things of this life.

In fine—(and this is the capital point)—why must the weak children of Adam, notwithstanding their weakness, be reduced to the dreadful alternative, either of apostatizing and being anathematized, or of enduring, at certain times of persecution, the most rigorous martyrdom? For in this it is, that the law of our God may appear, to the wise ones of this world, overstrained in its principles. It commands us, under pain of eternal damnation, to be habitually disposed to suffer even death, rather than so much as disguise our faith. Now is this (say you) reasonable? And I answer, can you doubt it? And to be convinced of it, what more is requisite, than the first principles of natural reason. The question is asked: whether it be reasonable rather to expose ourselves to certain death, than betray the faith we owe to God? But give me leave to ask, whether it be not reasonable, that a subject should be ready rather to lose his life, than betray the fidelity he owes his sovereign? That a man of honour should be in a disposition, rather to suffer everything, than commit a base perfidious deed? That a military gentleman should rather sacrifice his person on a thousand dangerous occasions, like a victim always on the point of being immolated, and of receiving the deadly blow, than fail in his duty? He not only thinks it agreeable to reason, but makes a point of it, and places his glory in it. How then, my brethren, (cries St. Augustin,) is it a folly to die a martyr to God, and a virtue to die a martyr to the world? Shall reasoning man find it hard to own the obligation of the one, while he approves and authorises the obligation of the other? No, no, Christians; there is nothing in it that is not proof against the keenest censure. Let us be but reasonable, and we shall avow, that the law of Christ is more so than we are. Let us candidly submit to what reason dictates, and nothing will seem harsh in the gospel-law. For if it seem harsh, it is because it makes us submit to reason, and forbids passion to interfere. Be pleased to take notice. I do not say that the Christian law adds nothing to reason; this is an error of the Pelagians; but I say it adds nothing that doth not perfect, that doth not elucidate, that doth not purify and embellish reason; and that reason herself would have established it, had she been, of herself, clear-sighted enough to discover its excellence and utility.

I know, beloved hearers—(and thus I pass on to the second verity, which, far from weakening, will corroborate and effectually confirm the former)—I know, and grant, that there have been,

at all times, in the world, men of a particular cast, who, intoxicated with their own chimerical notions, have carried this perfection of the Christian law beyond its true bounds. Mind my meaning. This is not unworthy of your reflection. I know (what St. Augustin hath already observed) that the perfection of the gospel, not rightly understood, and supported by a false, untoward zeal, hath given occasion, in course of ages, to the most obstinate and rancorous heresies. And to descend to the particular kinds: I know that from the first planting of the church, there have arisen sects (as the apostle calls them) of the perfect and enlightened, of whom some condemned matrimony, others the use of flesh-meat; some reiterated penance, others, the flying from persecution; reprobating, by their self-assumed authority, whatever seemed to them not sufficiently holy; and taking, to that end, upon them the business not only of reformers, but of sovereigns and legislators. I know, that one of the dreams of Pelagius was, to confound the counsels with the precepts; and to pretend, for instance, that without a real and effective renunciation of all temporal property, there was no salvation; not admitting that a Christian was allowed to possess anything, without a kind of apostatizing and belying his profession. I know that some, upon this principle, have gone so far, as to cause disturbance in civil society, charging with irregularity the established custom of claiming one's right by due course of law. These words they took to the letter, "Of him that taketh away thy goods, ask them not again;" (Luke vi.;) and not foreseeing the dreadful consequences that must follow from it, or the handle it would give to rapacity and avarice, they forbade the Christian to reclaim his property upon any score, no, though it were wrested from his hands by violence. I say, I know all this; and I likewise know, that these wrong notions of Christian perfection have been generally an occasion of the Christian law being despicable to pagans, insupportable to libertines, and a scandal and cause of lapse to weak and timorous minds: (another remark is this of St. Augustin;) despicable to pagans, who, forming by that their judgment of our religion, have rejected it as extravagant, though the work and master-piece of the wisdom of God: insupportable to libertines, who are glad, in matters of obligation and duty, that things are exaggerated, as it gives them a pretext to believe nothing of all it teaches, and more especially to do nothing of all it prescribes, and to hold that too much is required of them, as it affords them an

opportunity of refusing all: a scandal and a cause of lapse to weak and timorous minds, who from these errors have regulated their consciences, and whom their wrong consciences have made to commit many crimes. For, these are the effects of this supposed perfection, when not commensurate with the rules of faith. But all this, beloved Christians, is not the perfection of the Christian law, because there is nothiug in all this which the Christian law hath not disavowed, and even stigmatized. As it hath protested against all the mitigation that could hurt its purity, so it could not suffer the severity of its maxims, in order to give it a false varnish and gloss of holiness, to be carried too far. Whatever appearance of reformation it might have observed in heresy, it adhered inviolably to this great rule, "a reasonable submission;" (Rom. xii.;) to the intent (says St. Jerom) that the keenest infidel might have nothing to object to it, and that the most refined reasoner should find nothing in it to leave him dissatisfied.

For let us but attentively consider this law, and the farther we dive into it, the wiser it will appear, whether it restrains our pleasures, or allows certain commendable and moderate recreations; whether it condemns our undertakings, or permits certain rational, and often necessary cares; whether it curbs our ambition, or leaves us the liberty to think of ourselves, and seek, by lawful means, a settlement in the world; whether it blames our luxury, or approves of a Christian decency and becoming appearance: we shall discover throughout the same admirable characteristics of wisdom. It is, therefore, perfect; but in such a manner, that its perfection gains the heart by convincing the head; accommodates itself to all states and conditions in life; far from causing disturbance or trouble, regulates everything, amends everything, preserves everything in good order; inspires humility without meanness, generosity without pride, liberty without licentiousness; keeps all the motions and affections of the soul in a proper equipoise; in a word, the law is perfect, and therefore cannot exceed the extent of these two words—prudence and truth.

2ndly. I must observe, moreover, that as by a disposition of the divine Providence, there is nothing overstrained in its perfection, so there is nothing mean in its moderation. What occasion would there be to insist on this point, if we did not live in an age in which the word of God must be a preservative for everything—against everything? No; the law of Christ is moderate without mean-

ness. Whatever endeavours the ring-leaders of heresy may have used to decry it in this respect, it hath clearly shown the purity of its tenets, and hath made their attacks conducive to its glory. In vain did Tertullian reproach it with indulgence in the forgiving of sins; in vain did he declaim against the Catholics of his time, and styled them, "carnal;" in vain did he represent the church as a field laid open to every kind of licentiousness: his invectives served only to show the asperity and bitterness of his zeal, and made no impression, save on the minds of some weak persons. True it is, that the Christian law drives no sinners to despair; but without driving them to despair, it inspires them with a fear much more salutary than despair; and without making any diminution in their confidence, checks their presumption. True it is, that it makes not damnation the eternal consequence of every transgression; but it doth not fail, on a thousand occasions, to lay open the danger in a manner capable to strike the saints themselves with terror. True it is, that it makes not every sin deserving of eternal pains; but it raises a horror even of offences the most venial, in the breast of every one that loves God, and is thoroughly desirous of salvation. True it is, that it makes a distinction between precepts and counsels; but at the same times declares, that a contempt of the counsels is an immediate disposition to a transgression of the precepts, and that one is an almost infallible consequence of the other.

Now, I own, Christians, that of all the motives which display the truth of the holy religion I profess, this is one of the most powerful. St. Augustin said, that a thousand reasons attached him to the faith; and he drew them up in such a manner, as might convince the most refractory spirit. But to me it appears, that this wisdom, so pure and divine, of the Christian law, hath I know not what in it particularly affecting; for I say, with Abbe Rupert: as there is a God, and his existence is ascertained by proofs the most palpable, and the most evident; and as our duty obliges us to honour this God by a peculiar worship, and an exercise of religion, I cannot be mistaken in embracing this religion, in which I discover a large store of wisdom and holiness, that cannot come but from above, and is incontestably superior to man. If it were a worldly wisdom, it might dazzle me; but were I but ever so little careful to scrutinize it, and acquire a competent knowledge of it, I should soon find out one weakness or other that would un-

deceive me. There is but one religion wise like ours, that is, of which the wisdom is holy, of which the wisdom is fixed on the basis of all virtues, to which I must vail, because it is undoubtedly the work of God, and nothing can be brought in opposition to it. I cry out with more reason than St. Peter, "Lord, it is good for us to be here." Ah! my Lord, it is happy for me, a happiness I cannot sufficiently esteem, to have known your law and to have embraced it. To this I must adhere; and that I may never deviate from it, I must be ready, like your martyrs, to sacrifice my fortune, and spill my blood. "Lord, it is good for us to be here." St. Peter begged leave, in a transport of joy, to remain on Mount Thabor; but because in begging it, he had only a temporal happiness in view, and not the never-ending blessedness of the life to come, the evangelist adds, that "he knew not what he said." Luke ix. For my own part, my God, I perfectly comprehend what I say; and it is owing to the thorough knowledge I have of it, that I earnestly beseech I may always remain steady and unshaken in obedience to, and the practise of, your law. "Lord, it is good for us to be here." In following it, I fear not, I shall go astray, for that of all laws it is the most reasonable and wise in its maxims, as it is the most amiable and mild by its unction; and this I shall make appear in the second part.

Part II. The greatness of God imports a sovereign right of commanding men to do great things, and likewise of requiring great services of them; but it likewise imports, that the great services which it requires, not only shall not overwhelm them with the heavy weight of their difficulties, but shall become pleasing, and even comfortable. For (as the learned Cossiodorus speaks) the glory of a master, so great as God, is to be served in such a manner, as that the very obligation of serving him shall become a blessing and happiness. Those who have endeavoured to explain, according to their own notions, the law of Christ, have run into error, by adhering too closely to one of these principles, without sufficiently attending to the other. It is true, Jesus Christ, our supreme Lawgiver, hath proposed his law to us as a yoke and a burden; but at the same time tells us, that this burden is light, and this yoke easy. Matt. xi. How comes it, that by an admirable contrivance of his wisdom, he hath only invited those to take upon them his yoke and burden, who, from other causes, were already loaded and fatigued, promising to relieve them, and never-

theless promising no other relief, than that of laying on them his yoke and burden? "Come unto me, all ye who labour, and I will refresh you." Matt. xi. It is a mystery, which seems, at first view, to imply an impossibility, and a contradiction; but the truth of it appears from the fulfilling of it. It is a mystery confirmed by the constant experience of all the righteous, and even of all the wicked, as nothing is more capable to relieve a sinner, loaded with the heavy weight of his crimes, and wearied with the galling slavery of the world, than to take the yoke of Christ upon him, and thoroughly submit to it.

In order, therefore, to frame a comprehensive and clear notion of the evangelic law, we must never separate these two things, which it hath so holily and divinely united—the *yoke* and *easiness*. And yet this separation men have made, who, prepossessed by self-love, considered only the words, "yoke and burden;" and in order to have some pretext for their malevolence, not joining to them that unction and ease which Jesus Christ hath added, have represented to themselves the Christian law as a dismal, heavy, insupportable law, made only to mortify them, and by this means have disgusted themselves and others too. Like those Israelites, who, having discovered the land of promise, inspired the people with a horror of it, by the frightful colours in which they painted it. For their report was, that "the land through which they had gone to search it, was a land that ate up the inhabitants thereof, and that in it they had seen monsters." Num. xiii. No artifice more dangerous and subtile than this hath the enemy of our salvation put in practice, for the perdition of souls, and to render in them all the seeds of Christianity ineffectual. But to employ it against a Christian well instructed, and grounded in his religion, and sincerely disposed to observe every point of the law to which he professes obedience, would be labour lost. The reason is, that such a person may guard against it easily by this thought, with which his faith protects him; that the more perfect the law of God is, the more the unction which accompanies it, makes it amiable, and easy to be put in practice; and whatever the flesh and the world may suggest to him to the contrary, he will always recur to this sentiment of David: "How sweet are thy words to my taste!" Ps. cxiii. How sweet, O Lord, is your law to those who have a relish of it! And how gross and sensual must be the man who hath no relish of it! And, indeed, if David could speak in

this manner under a law so rigorous as that of Moses, it would be not only a shame, but a crime, not to say as much of the Christian law, inasmuch as it is a law of grace and charity. Be pleased to observe, beloved Christians, these two qualities, which are essential to the law of Christ—it is a law of grace, and it is a law of charity. This is what enables you to observe it, notwithstanding all the difficulties of its duties, and what will make your excuses void in the presence of God. Be pleased to take notice:

1st. It is a law of grace, by which Almighty God infallibly affords us wherewithal to fulfil that which he commands us; or, rather, by which Almighty God himself fulfils in us that which he requires. What would you have more? That which hinders you from fulfilling the law, and even makes you despair of ever fulfilling it, is, you say, the vicious disposition of your heart, and that flesh of sin which perpetually rebels against the Spirit. But suppose, my brethren (replies St. Chrysostom,) that God should speak to you in this manner: O man, I will now take from you that heart and will give you another; your strength is that of a man only, but I will impart to you that of a God. It is not you alone that will act, that will combat, that will resist; I myself will combat within you, will triumph over your evil inclination and corrupt flesh. If God should speak to you in this manner, and make you this offer, would you dare to complain? Now in how many parts of the inspired writings hath he made you this promise? Was it not to you he said by the mouth of the prophet Ezekiel, I will take from you that obdurate heart, and I will replace it with another, a docile heart, and submissive to my law? Is it not an article of divine faith, that this promise regarded those who were to live under the law of grace? And do not you live under the law of grace, having been regenerated in the laver of life? What then should you fear? That God will not be as good as his word? This were to call his faithfulness in question. That, notwithstanding the word of God, you shall find it too hard to observe his law? This were to call his power in question.

Lord, (cries St. Augustin,) command what you please, provided you give me that which you command: that is, provided you give me strength by your grace to execute what you command by your precept. Spare me not, O God; regard not my delicacy, nor consider what I am; for as it is you that must conquer in me, it is in you, not in myself, I must place my confidence. Exert, therefore,

your supreme dominion, load me with the whole weight of your commandments, oblige me to undergo whatever my senses or my self-love abhor most, make me walk through narrow and thorny paths: with your holy grace I shall proceed cheerfully. I speak of it (adds he) from personal experience. For, it was you, my Lord, that broke my chains, and I wish to publish it, for the interest of your glory, and the justification of your law, to all mankind. You could do anything in me, and I could do anything, assisted by you. With what felicity did I relinquish those shameful pleasures, to which I had been so long a slave! And how pleasiug was it to abandon that which I once was in so much dread of losing! I fancied I saw in your law and in myself unconquerable monsters; but so soon as my heart was touched with your grace, I perceived they were only imaginary monsters; and for this reason, I take in the whole circle of your service, without exception, and without reserve. Thus spoke St. Augustin: and if such be the force of divine grace, with what face can we tell the God of heaven that his yoke is oppressive and hard to bear?

But I have not the grace which upheld St. Augustin, and induced him to act. Perhaps, Christians, you have it not; but do you put yourselves in a condition to have it? Do you take the measures requisite to obtain it? Do you beg it of God? Do you seek it in the fountains in which he hath placed it, which are the sacraments? Do you clear your hearts of the bad weeds which are an obstacle to its taking root? Is it not strange, that though you do nothing to facilitate the observance of this law, you still should dare to complain of its difficulties, instead of imputing them to yourselves, and to your want of resolution? God, beloved hearers, will put this criminal irresolution to shame, by removing the mistake which gave occasion to it, and which you made use of as a pretext. For he will tell you with more reason than he told his people: it is not the rigorous precepts of the law that can, or that ought to plead your innocence; the command I laid on you (this is the purport of God's own words in the holy scriptures) was above neither your reach, nor your strength. It is not placed in the high heavens, so that you might say, who can aspire to it? Neither is it to be sought in a distant land, so that you might ask, who can think of coming at it? So far from it, it was close by you —it was in your heart; it was so to be found in your state of life, that it might have been done with all ease. The reason is, that

my holy grace, at the same time, was annexed to it. Now God, by these words, meant only to remove all our pretexts, when we plead exemption from the observance of his law, and consider it only in itself, and in a partial view, not considering the relics and aids with which it abounds.

For, to say that these relics and aids are wanting at the very time we beg them; to say that all the great promises which God hath made us, showering down upon us the plenitude of his Spirit, do not include wherewithal to go through the performance of his will with joy and comfort; to say that the pre-eminence of the law of grace over the written law is reduced to nothing, and that the whole effect of the redemption and death of our blessed Saviour, hath been to enhance the weight of his yoke, would be so many blasphemies, beloved Christians, against the goodness and fidelity, of God. In what then are we deficient? In two things: a sincere faith, and a lively hope; the one, to make us adhere to God, the other, to make us put our trust in him. For by uniting ourselves with him in this manner, we should change our weakness, as the prophet speaks, into invincible strength: "They who hope in the Lord, shall change their strength; shall take wings like eagles; shall fly, and shall not fail." Isai. xl. But because we keep at a distance from him, we are always in a languishing, weak condition, ever oppressed with disgust and melancholy, ever in low spirits and despair; as if the gospel of Christ were not a law of grace, and the law of grace had not removed all obstacles and difficulties.

2ndly. What if I should say, that this law of grace is, moreover, a law of charity and love, of which the proper effect is, to lenify every thing, making them not only possible but easy, not only supportable but agreeable; and to take from the yoke its whole weight, and, if I may venture so to speak, the heavier it is, make it so much the lighter. A paradox which St. Augustin explains by a very natural comparison, and which I may use, after that father. You see the birds; they have wings, of which they bear the weight; but the very thing of which they bear the weight, is what makes them nimble, and the more weight they bear, the nimbler they are. Take away, therefore, his wings from a bird, and you disburden him; but by disburdening him, you put it out of his power to fly. On the other hand, restore him his wings; let him be but burdened with them afresh, and he will rise aloft. The reason is, that while he bears his wings, his wings bear him.

He carries them on the ground, and they carry him through the air. Such (says St. Augustin) is the law of Christ. We carry it, and it carries us: we carry it, by obeying it, and putting it in practice; but it carries us, by exciting us, strengthening us, and encouraging us. Every other burden is a dead weight, but this hath wings.

But to wave this figure, beloved Christians, and to speak more home to the purpose. Almighty God, the supreme Creator, possessed three qualities with respect to his creatures: that of Master, which subjected us to him in the quality of slaves; that of Rewarder, which brought us over to him in quality of mercenaries; and that of Father, which attaches us to him in quality of children. Now according to these three qualities, (it is a reflection of St. Bernard,) God Almighty hath delivered three statutes to mankind; one, of authority, as to his slaves; another, of hope, as to his mercenaries; and another, of love, as to his children. The two first were statutes of suffering, but the last was a statute of joy and consolation. And the consequence was, (St. Augustin tells us,) that men have groaned under these statutes of labour and fear, which could not, however, induce them to love that which they practised; whereas Christians have found a relish in the law of grace, that rendered it amiable, and an unction that made them observe it with pleasure. Self-interested and covetous, under the two first laws, men feared a God an avenger of their avarice; but, notwithstanding this fear, they ceased not to commit the most iniquitous violences, to deprive others of their property, or, if ability failed, at least to covet them. Whereas in the new law, they have been lovingly attached to God, assuming human nature, and although he appeared poor in this world, yet for love of him, far from appropriating that to themselves which did not belong to them, they have distributed their fortunes among the poor, and by a voluntary cession divested themselves of every thing.

The lovers of the world cannot comprehend this; and yet they might easily comprehend it by themselves, and by their own sentiments. They know not what we say, when we speak of the marvellous effects of charity in the human heart; but let them judge of it by that which even the love of the world does in themselves. To what law doth not the love of the world, which they idolize, hold them in subjection? Doth it not subject them to the law of duty, which is just but painful? To the law of sin, which is

unjust and shameful? To the law of custom, which is extravagant and unaccountable? To the law of worldly consideration, which is cruel and tyrannous? To the law of fashion, which is disgusting and tiresome? Nevertheless, because they love the world, whatever is in the service of the world most troublesome, most inconvenient, most disagreeable, most grating, become easy to them. They find nothing hard, to satisfy the duties of the world, to conform to the customs of the world, to observe the fashions of the world, to deserve the favour of the world. Now let them love God, as they love the world; let them, instead of adhering to the world, adhere to God; and the law of the Lord, which seems impracticable, will change its nature, if I may so speak with regard to them. They will labour, it is true, but in their labour they will find repose; they will engage in combats, but in their combats they will find peace; they will renounce all things, but in their renunciation they will find their treasure. They will endure every thing, and mortify themselves in every thing; but in their penitence and mortification they will find their happiness.

Thus it is that the law of God is at the same time a yoke and a relief, a burden and a support. If you call it in question, I appeal not to the testimony of your own heart; for, you cannot bear witness to that of which you have no idea: I appeal to the testimony of so many saints who have experienced it, and righteous persons who do still experience it every day. How then! Hath not this law of charity turned ignominious chains into honourable bands? Witness St. Peter and St. Paul. Hath it not given irresistible attraction even to the cross? Witness St. Andrew. Hath it not afforded refrigeration in the midst of flames? Witness St. Laurence. Doth it not work miracles without end before our eyes? Is it not this that makes so many virgins undergo cheerfully all the austerities of the cloister? Is it not this that engages so many edifying penitents in a holy war against themselves, and instructs them in the method of crucifying their flesh? Is it not this that makes evangelical poverty be preferred to riches; obedience, to liberty; celibacy, to matrimony; abstinence, fasts, haircloths, flagellations, to all the ease and convenience of life? Have I mentioned anything, of which the world hath not afforded frequent instances? And are not these instances so many instructive lessons for you? If, therefore, (says St. Jerom,) the law seems hard, you must lay the blame of it neither on the law, nor on the

difficulties which attend it, but on yourself, and on your indifference to Almighty God. The law is hard for those who fear it, and wish to enlarge the indulgence of it; whom the Spirit of God, that Spirit of grace, that Spirit of love, awakens not, enlivens not, affects not, because they are unwilling to be affected by it. Let us, however, be of good heart, and, with a holy desire of pleasing God, let us enter the blessed way of his precepts: we shall walk in it steadily, shall advance speedily, and shall come to the joys of the kingdom of heaven.

SERMON IX.

ON THE CHRISTIAN'S CHARACTER.

"*The Pharisees being met together; Jesus asked them, saying: What think ye of Christ?*" MATT. xxii.

If passion had not blinded these pretended teachers of the divine law, they might easily have answered the question which was put them by the Son of God, and have discovered in his person all the characteristic marks of the Christ, or Messiah, whom they had long expected, and who was actually in their presence. Being ocular witnesses to so many miracles, as when he calmed the fury of the raging billows, cast out devils, gave health to the sick, raised the dead to life, ought they not to have answered without hesitation. Yourself is the Christ of whom you speak? As for us, beloved hearers, we acknowledge no other. And yet how important and necessary soever may be the knowledge of this God-man, it is a subject (says St. Chrysostom) which the ministers of the gospel should beware of fathoming too deeply in their discourses, because it is impenetrable, and infinitely beyond as well the reach of their mental knowledge, as oral expressions.

Nevertheless, my brethren, we know him sufficiently to take him for a model. Nay, (according to the doctrine of those great men, St. Jerom and St. Augustin,) such is the relation between Christ and a Christian, that they must, in some sort, be blended together,

as one without the other cannot be defined. So that if Christ Jesus be not in the Christian verily and substantially, he is in him by similitude; and if the Christian be not really, and in the main of his existence in Christ Jesus, he is in him by as true and perfect a conformity as he can have to so excellent and divine an original. Pursuant to this principle, without examining at present what the Christ is, let us rather examine what the Christian is, the Christian who is bound to be the true and faithful imitator of the Christ: "What think ye?" This subject will be more moral, more profitable, and more affecting. By it you will learn what you are, or rather say, what you should be, and what you are not.

Whatever the meaning of St. Jerom might have been, to me it appears, that in his proposition there is judgment and justness, when he says, that to be really, and not seemingly, a Christian, is great. And this is one reason which he alleges for it: that whereas Christianity is a profession of humility, and whereas humility doth not try to display its own excellence, it follows, that the greatness of a Christian is, to be, and not seem to be, what he really is; as it often happens that his perfection consists, at least in part, in his seeming not to be what he really is. This brings me naturally to my design; and in order to convey to you a distinct notion, and impress you with an adequate idea of a Christian, I take it from its principle and model, Christ Jesus, agreeably to two particular characteristics which he attributes to himself, when speaking to the Jews, to make himself known to them, he said, "I am not of this world;" (John viii.;) and again, "I am from above." John viii. I come from heaven, and yet I remain immutably united with God my Father. These two characteristics I purpose to lay before you, which will delineate the Christian in the completest manner. What, think ye, is a Christian?

First: a man, by his profession, separated from the world.

Secondly: a man, by his profession, consecrated to God.

Both the one and the other, though of no significancy in the eyes of men, are replete themselves with glory and virtue. For, who is more insignificant in the eyes of men, than the man who withdraws from the noise of the world? But who hath more internal and latent virtues, than the man whose life is consecrated to God? Now this hidden mystery I take upon me to unfold. A separation from the world, which raises the Christian above the world, will be seen in the first part; a consecration to God, which

raises the Christian up to God, will be seen in the second. This shall be the division of the present discourse.

PART I. That you may the more easily comprehend my meaning, and that my arguments may rest on the principles of theology, relatively to the subject which I purpose to treat of, it ought to be premised, that two things (according to St. Thomas) are essentially requisite to make a true Christian: grace, or vocation, on the part of God, and a faithful correspondence with this grace, or vocation, on the part of man. Now both the one and the other, considered attentively, have no characteristic more suitable and more proper, than retirement from the world. So that to be effectually separated from the world, is to be effectually a Christian. And this is the whole scope of this first part.

What is grace, I say the first of all graces, the call to Christianity? Divines and the fathers have greatly exerted themselves, and laboured hard, to give us a sublime and perfect idea of it. But none, as I take it, is equally accurate and solid with St. Augustin, when he tells us, in short, that it is the grace of vocation. Would you wish to know, beloved brethren, (says this holy doctor,) who are the elect, called like the apostle, according to the decree, but the favourable decree of Almighty God? Those whom he hath distinguished, whom he hath withdrawn from the corrupt mass of the world; whom he hath withdrawn by the virtue and grace of their vocation. It is actually, therefore, in this separation, that the attractive, the impulse, and the particular impression of grace consists. Hence St. Paul, to express the impulse gift of grace, which had been conferred on him in the miraculous vocation which followed his conversion, a vocation pregnant with the greatest prodigies, made use of no other terms but these: "Who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace." Whatever I am, I am by the mercy of my God who called me. And how hath he called me? By separating me from my mother's womb: that is, (according to the explication of St. Ambrose,) by fixing upon me to live separate from the corruption of the world. Hence, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles, when the Spirit of God diffused his visible and abundant graces among Christ's disciples—graces that raised them to the most sacred ministrations, it was always by ordering that those whom he had chosen for that purpose, should be separated from the rest, nay, the rest of the faithful: "Separate me Saul and

Barnabas," (Acts xiii.) for the important work to which I have called them. As if this separation (subjoins St. Chrysostom) had been a kind of sacrament, by which the grace of divine vocation was to have been abundantly communicated to them. Hence it arises, that the Saviour of the world, to signify that he was come to call the sons of men to evangelical perfection, loudly declared, that he was "come to separate a man from his father, and the daughter from her mother;" (Matt. x.;) reducing the whole grace of that perfection to this spirit only of separation from the world. Hence the apostle, when he would make us comprehend the transcendent and infinite grace, arising from the sanctity of Christ Jesus, comprised the whole mystery of it in these few words, "Separated from sinners." Heb. vii. God hath given us a high priest, who, by the celestial unction with which he was replenished, was to all intents and purposes separated from the mass of sinners. Now you know that the sanctity of Christ our Lord is the pattern of ours; and that ours, to please God, must resemble his. As this God-man, therefore, was sanctified by a grace which separated him from the world in the most perfect manner, so also the grace by which we are sanctified, must produce in us, proportionably, the like effect. In consequence of which the Lord may say to us, as he said to the Israelites: you are my select people, and I look upon you as such; but to what purpose, and in what manner? Because I have separated you from all the other people who inhabit the globe; people bewildered in the darksome mazes of idolatry and infidelity. This is the characteristic of Christian vocation, or the grace of Christianity. Now hence it is, that I draw the proof of my first proposition; and proportioning, (according to St. Bernard's rule,) by the divine operation, our obligation to the Deity, I enter upon a topic, the most edifying that this subject is capable of furnishing.

Christian vocation, as it proceeds from God, and is inspired by him, is a grace of separation. Therefore the correspondence which it requires, and which is due to it, and which properly makes up the duty of a Christian, is a correspondence of separation on the part of man, because the correspondence with divine grace must be referred to the end to which the grace is referred. For as "there are diversities of graces" (1 Cor. xii.) and inspirations, so it must be acknowledged, that "there are diversities of operations" (1 Cor. xii.) and duties in man. That is, with every kind

of grace, every kind of duty is not correspondent. My meaning is this: God gives me a grace to resist and guard against a passion that prompts me to commit sin. With this grace I cannot correspond, but by resisting and guarding against the passion that prompts me. On the other hand, he gives a grace to avoid the occasion of sin. To this grace I cannot be faithful but by flight and retirement; because (says St. Prosper) my business is to follow the impulse of grace, and not the business of grace, to be ruled by my impulse. As, therefore, the grace by which Almighty God hath called me to Christianity, or to the profession and practice of Christianity, is nothing but a grace of separation from the world, whatever I do, I shall never fulfil the duties of Christianity, without separating from the world, and doing that for God which God first did for me.

For, God to no purpose, by pre-ordaining me to be a Christian, separates me from the world, if I separate not from it of my own accord, by executing the decree, and co-operating with the grace that makes me a Christian. These two separations, if I may be permitted so to speak, must concur together, and that of God must be seconded by mine, as that of God is the sacred origin from which mine flows. Do you conceive this verity? This, in substance, is all the divinity necessary for a Christian, all in which he ought to put his trust and confidence. For, some consequences may be thence deduced, which each of us, this day, should apply to himself, as so many rules whereby to recognise, and judge of his conduct in the presence of God. Let nothing, I beseech you, of what I am going to advance, escape you.

The first consequence: no more is requisite than your being a Christian, to bring on you an obligation of living in this spirit of separation from the world? But what mean we by the world? We mean the false pleasures, the profane joys, the criminal intrigues, the luxury, the pastimes, the folly, the customs, or rather the evil practices; in a word, all that foments and nourishes the corruption and dissoluteness of the world. We mean whatever the beloved disciple understood, when he forebade us "to love the world, or those things which are in the world." John ii. We mean what he explained himself more largely, when he added, that "all that is in the world, is the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." John ii. We mean what he commanded us to detest and shun, when he concluded, that "the whole

world was set in wickedness." 1 John v. The being, I say, a Christian, is sufficient, alone, to lay on us an obligation, by our profession and state, of separating from it; and for that there needs only the being a Christian, forasmuch, as we renounce it the moment that we are regenerated by the grace of Christianity. This you all know, beloved hearers; and unless you disclaim what the church hath solemnly transacted in your name, and what you since have ratified a thousand times, you cannot disown it.

And, in fact, when heretofore the fathers dissuaded the faithful from resorting to certain diversions, diversions of which the world at all times was passionately fond, and a fondness for which was a distinctive mark of the man of the world, they used no other argument than that of their being Christians, and being separated from the world; and this was, alone, sufficiently convictive. The theatre, (says one of them, Tertullian,) which is nothing but an open scene of lasciviousness, is a boundary that separates the pagans from us; for they flock to it, and we abhor it: and the difference is only a consequence resulting from the difference of our religions. In like manner, when he recommended to the women, modesty and simplicity in their outward carriage, which, in their regard, may be deemed the first step toward separating from the world, how did he address them? You are Christians, (said he,) and, by consequence, separated from all those things which have relation to vanity. You have given up theatrical shows and exhibitions; you are no longer reckoned in the number of those who frequent public places, with a view only to see and be seen; you have bidden farewell to that kind of company, in which pride or pageantry, or licentiousness, or incontinence, maintains the bond of criminal intercourses; in quality of Christians, you are known no longer to appear in the world, but to perform all the deeds of charity and devotion; to visit the poor and infirm who are your brethren; to pay your adoration at the divine sacrifice, and to hear the word of God. All this, however, is directly opposite to that worldly spirit, that infatuation inherent in your self-love. I own it may be necessary to hold communication with infidel women; but you are, therefore, unworthy of the name you bear, if, by your example, you give them not a notion of what you are, and you be not careful to appear in the genuine ornaments of your sex, which are a sense of modesty and a strict decorum. Thus, we see, that Tertullian's argument was raised on the basis of Christian duty, a convincing

argument to the faithful of those times; and wo be to us, if we stubbornly resist and spurn at conviction.

It is a mistake, therefore, a gross and pernicious mistake, to say, "as I am a man of the world, I cannot refrain from living by its rules, and conforming to its maxims." For, this is what ruins you; this is the source of all your ill conduct. Now, I needs must tell you, that to speak in this manner is a kind of blasphemy. For although the Son of God hath, in express terms, declared to you in the gospel, that you are no longer of this world, yet you suppose that you are, and pretend to be of it in the very same sense that he declared you were not. We must then invert the proposition, and say: I am no longer of the world, because I am a Christian; therefore, I am not any longer allowed to live by its rules, or comform to its maxims. Then will you speak according to the spirit and grace of your vocation.

But this is too general. The second consequence: in the Christian religion, the more careful one is to retire from the world, the more one is a Christian; and the greater one's engagements and connexion with it is, (except the connexion which relates to one's duty, and the engagement one is in by necessity and one's station,) the less one is a Christian. The reason is this: according to the measure of these two states, he partakes more or less in the grace of separation, which constitutes a Christian. This is so evident, (it is a remark of the holy bishop of Geneva, Francis de Sales,) that when heretofore the grace of Christianity was observed to operate with all its virtue, force, and fulness, on the minds of men, its influence was such as to cause separations, which, in the opinion of the world itself, amounted to heroism. Arsenius is honoured and esteemed at court: this grace withdraws him, and transports him to the wilderness. Melania enjoys all the delights and pomp of affluence at Rome: this grace disengages her, and makes her seek the delights of retirement at Bethlehem. Never were there so many illustrious anchorets, that is, so many illustriously severed from the world, as in those first ages of the church of Christ, because there never were so many fervent and perfect Christians. And why do we suppose that monasteries, at all times, were a refuge for sanctity, but because sanctity dwells in them quite sequestered from the noise of the world?

What mean we by a fervent and well regulated religion? Give ear to St. Bernard, and permit me to bear witness to a well known

truth. What mean we by a fervent and well regulated religion, such as it appears at this present time? It is a standing representation of Christianity. It is (says St. Bernard) a particular Christianity, which, in the destruction of universal Christianity, was saved, as it were, from shipwreck and ruin, and which Providence preserved, like that Christianity, which from the beginning was held in veneration by the very pagans. This, beloved hearers, this is what renders religion respectable. On the contrary, I learn by woful experience, that the more a Christian intermeddles in the affairs and intrigues of the world, the less he is a Christian; and as he takes steps and advances in them, the spirit of Christianity is proportionably impaired and vitiated in him. Insomuch, that when the fathers speak of solicitations for the things of this world, or of vanities and pleasures which discover an attachment to them, they affirm, without difficulty, that all this includes a kind of apostacy. The reason is, that the grace of faith being a principle of separation with regard to these things, not effectually to renounce them, is to renounce, in some measure, the grace of faith.

But I proceed further. The third consequence: it is utterly impossible for a Christian man to be truly reformed, and return to God, unless he be resolved to bid adieu to the world, differently from what he hath hitherto done; and it implies a contradiction, to desire to be of the world, and as deeply engaged in its follies as ever, and pretend to the practice of that sincere penitence which produces salvation. For how, beloved hearers, can these two things be supposed reconcileable? You grant, yourselves, that it was the world which destroyed in you the spirit of your religion, and the spirit of your God. It is, therefore necessary, that to receive this spirit, you retire from the world, and that instead of continuing vainly to imagine, that this spirit may be found where it is not, you seek it where it is. Now what is more evident, than that the Spirit of God is not to be found in that kind of world of which we here speak, as, far from finding it there, it was there you lost it?

And here I cannot help being moved with compassion, seeing certain souls, with whom we may say that the world abounds, who although they cannot, once for all, resolve upon this separation from an alluring world, yet have they their eternal welfare at heart, and deliberate for ever, but never amend. God inspires their minds, grace acts within them, they conceive a thousand ardent desires of obtaining salvation. You would think them quite altered, and

that the charm was broken; and notwithstanding all this, do but touch the point of withdrawing from the world. Ah! Christians, this is a requisition more affecting than death, a requisition at which they perpetually recoil. For this reason, they are ingenious at finding out pretexts and expedients for laying stress on the engagements that keep them in the world, and, in their apologies for it, exert all their powers, and all their address. Alas! (say they) may we not be of the world, and work out our salvation? Is not God the author of those stations, which are censured so loudly under the name of world? May not we of the world arrive to perfection, as well as those who are immured in cloisters? But when we make answer, that the case relates not to the world in general; that we mean a certain world, in which sin hath the vogue, because it is a world; in which libertinism passes for agreeable and harmless, in which detraction is the ground-work of all conversation; in which all the passions are, as it were, concentrated, and in their own element; in which there are rocks without end—rocks against which conscience must unavoidably split; that this is the world which they must studiously shun, if they pretend to list under the banners of Christ: that, on this head, they must observe no mean, try no expedient, but proceed steadily, without tergiversation; that their conversion depends upon a generous and total defalcation of this nature, and a weaning of their affections from superfluous pageantry and forbidden pleasures: if you talk in this strain, yet hath grace this eternal obstacle to surmount, and rarely surmounts it in these worldly souls; because, to disunite them from such a world, is to divide them from themselves, a thing theywill never come into effectually, because they were only of that mind imperfectly.

Is it possible, (say they,) is it possible to live, and not see the world? What should I do, should I openly declare I was no longer of the world? To what should I betake myself, in order to shake off the irksomeness arising from such a retreat? What would the world think, what would mankind say of me? For, these are the difficulties which the spirit of the world is wont to raise in a soul that begins to treat with the Lord about her conversion. And I say, Christians, that had you but ever so little faith, or in other words, had you hearkened but ever so little to faith, you would blush and be confounded at these sentiments. No, no, my Lord, (would you say to God,) it is not upon that my resolution must depend, and I argue like an infidel, when I

speak to that purpose. Whether I find this renouncing of the world difficult or easy, whether it be productive of grief or joy, whether it be approved or condemned by the world, because it is necessary I must yield submission to it. If to forsake the world be painful to me, I will accept this pain, in satisfaction for my criminal attachment to it. And how often, my God, have I found the world intolerably wearisome? And will it be too much to suffer all this for you? The world will blame me; but, alas! what avails it, whether it praise or condemn me, as sincerely to shun it is my fixed resolution? I cast what will mostly then take up my time; and will it be deemed much, or overstraining the point, to keep a constant eye, and adhere to the duties of my religion and calling? Are not these occupations more becoming and worthy, than those which in the world I made the business of life? Occupations that dissipated, but enlarged not my mind, and corrupted my heart, but left it void and unsatisfied.

In the mean time, Christians, do you desire to know what this relinquishing of the world is? It is the grand point, the practical duty which remains to be explained. I speak not here of the vicious and bad qualities attending it. This, indeed, would furnish many solid reflections, but would not, perhaps, be universally relished. My utmost endeavours shall not be wanting, to penetrate into the utmost recesses of your hearts, in order to gain them over to the Lord your God.

The manner of quitting the world is two-fold—false and true. The manner which we, I presume, shall adopt, will be such as it should be, will be sincere and disinterested, and will proceed from God. Upon this assumption, I say, that there are two different ways of quitting the world: one, corporeal and external; the other, mental and internal. I say, that both, toward the leading of a truly Christian life, are necessary; forasmuch, as the quitting of the world externally is a mere phantom, if not internally supported and animated, and that the quitting of it externally cannot hold or subsist without internal aid. It is a maxim of St. Bernard, and indeed of all the other fathers. We must quit the world, with all our heart and with all our mind. To make show of quitting it by my apparel, my condition, my abode, my function, my conversation, answers no purpose, if I am still attached to it by affection and inclination. It is by the heart I must begin the separation. Now, beloved Christians, in the midst of your embarrassments and

worldly concerns, you may fully possess this separation of the heart, and in the same perfection (if the will be not wanting) as religious and solitaries, forasmuch as the heart is subordinate to the will, and at your own disposal.

But this is not all. The separation of the heart must be accompanied, or rather, must be upheld by the other, which is external and corporeal; because such is the contagion (says St. Gregory) of the world, that men the most chaste, the most holy, and the most disengaged from a love and affection to it, are liable to be ensnared by its deceitful blandishments. These, therefore, we must weaken from time to time; of these, we must lessen the impression by retiring, and externally withdrawing from their dangerous influence. We must do like those consuls and princes of the earth, of whom Job speaks, who, in their very palaces, built themselves solitudes, wherein they lived in the midst of the world, as though dissevered from it: "With kings and consuls who built themselves solitudes." Job vi.

Hence those holy retreats arose, which are so much practised by the Christian people, and which produce such marvellous effects of grace. In these retirements, what do they do? They hear the voice of God, they converse familiarly and peaceably with him, they are feelingly affected with his communications, to which they correspond. O my brethren, the days you shall pass in these pious, these solitary exercises of devotion, will be properly your days; and we may say, that without them, all other days are in a manner lost to you. What is very deplorable, they are mostly admired and practised by those who stand least in need of them. For who have the greatest occasion for them? Not the ecclesiastic, nor the recluse, who, conformably to his profession, leads a regular life. Who then? That man of business, whose conscience is loaded with a thousand injustices, which he will never behold in a proper light, but in retirement; that retainer to the court, who will never, but in retirement, think seriously of his salvation; that woman of the world, who is immersed in wickedness, and entangled in corruption, from which nothing but retirement is capable to extricate her. These are they, for whom spiritual exercises and retreats are needful. For others, they are of counsel, but for these, they are oftentimes of strict obligation; because, according to the natural order of grace, and the usual ways of divine Providence, they become, for them, the only means of saving their souls.

These, beloved hearers, are the outlines of Christianity. Let us leave the world, before the world leaves us; for leave it we must, either by choice, and from virtuous motives, or by compulsion, and of necessity. Now, were it not more eligible, that this should be done by the attractives of grace, than by the violence of death? Let us leave the world, while it is in our power to bear this testimony in our own behalf, and in the presence of God; that we leave it for his, and for righteousness' sake. For what honour do we pay to God, by betaking ourselves to him, because we can no longer relish the world, or, to speak more properly, because we can no longer be relished by the world? What glory accrues to him from the amendment of our lives, an amendment arising not from an effort to abandon creatures, but from a secret despair, for that creatures abandon us? Let us leave the world in the manner in which, at the judgment of God, we should wish to have left it; and as (according to St. Augustin) the judgment of God, with regard to the righteous, will not be a punishment, but a mere separation, let us anticipate, in this life, the effect of that judgment. Let us now do that, which God will do then; let us show ourselves now in the rank in which we shall then appear: that is, let us appear distinguished from the ungodly and the reprobated; let us not procrastinate, nor wait till the coming of Christ our Lord; let us so conduct ourselves, that at whatever time he shall come to judge us, finding us disengaged in this perfect manner, there will only need his ratification. Let us separate from the world, that God may not separate us from his chosen servants. For as there is (according to the scripture doctrine) a separation of mercy and a separation of grace, so is there also of rigour and justice; and the strongest imprecation which the inspired psalmist uttered against his enemies (which were always the enemies of God) was, "Lord, divide them from the few." Ps. xvi. Separate them from the elect, from the small number whom you have chosen, and whom you beheld in your divine foreknowledge from all eternity.

Above all things, Christians, beware of imagining that the relinquishing of the world is a dismal undertaking, a melancholy situation. What though it were such, considering how salutary and necessary it is, you should make it the object of your love and desire. But I fear not to affirm, that if you be faithful to God in this, he will make your souls overflow with delights, infinitely pre-

ferable to all the joys and pleasures of the senses. In fact, there are none, among all mankind, more happy than they who have no kind of intercourse with the rest of mankind. The truth of this is universally allowed. Strange, that we should fear to enjoy that which we know constitutes the happiness of others. And yet such, beloved hearers, is the infatuation of our minds, and the inordination of our lives; enamoured with the world, though convinced of its inanity; always disgusted with it, but never disengaged from it. However, my brethren, the first characteristic of a Christian is, to be separated from the world. But we must not stop there. The second is, to be consecrated to God, as I am going to set forth in the second part.

PART. II. The service of the great, with respect to kings, bear a resemblance to the service of the saints in relation to God. For as sovereigns confer upon persons of high rank and merit the superintendence of their household, so may we conceive that the Lord of heaven and earth confers grace and sanctity on men who bear the character of consecration, are found good and faithful servants, and worthy to be of his household. All men (says St. Gregory) are essentially subject to the power of God; but all men are not, therefore, consecrated to him. This consecration is produced by a grace peculiar to Christianity. In order to examine this doctrine in a profound manner, be pleased to take with you three things worthy of your reflection; things capable to fill the heart with the noblest sentiments, and the head with the most sublime ideas of faith. The excellence of what I call the consecration of a Christian; the indispensable obligation of a holy life, which this consecration imposes upon a Christian; the peculiar stain, which, by woful necessity, and in consequence of this consecration, is inherent in every sin of a Christian. Should I be so happy, beloved hearers, as to make you comprehend these three articles, I may expect from you everything that is good and great.

1st. What is baptismal unction, by virtue of which we are denominated Christians? It is (says St. Cyprian) a solemn consecration of our persons to God, in which it should seem that he had collected together, to make it the more precious, all the riches of his grace. For (adds this father) we are consecrated by baptism, I know not how many ways, all which should inspire us with a respect for ourselves. By it we are consecrated as kings, as priests, as temples of God, as children of God, and as members of God.

Ah! beloved hearers, let us find ourselves out, let us know what we are, and let us be ashamed, if we are not what so many concurring motives should make us.

By baptism, we are consecrated as kings and priests. So the apostle St. Peter declares, when speaking to the Christians, in his first epistle; he ascribes to them these two qualities, by calling them "a kingly priesthood." 1 Peter ii. In like manner, the beloved disciple makes the blessing of redemption to consist partly in this: that Christ our Lord, who is the sovereign Redeemer, "hath made us to our God a kingdom and priests." Apoc. v. And, indeed, as Christians, we are destined to reign; nor is it exaggeration, or a figurative expression, to say, that in baptism we are consecrated to possess a kingdom—the kingdom of heaven; that in it we receive the investiture of a crown—the crown of heaven; and, that when the grace of this sacrament is conferred on us, we are legally entitled to claim the throne which the Son of God hath prepared for us in heaven.

As Christians, we are also consecrated priests of the living God. For the baptismal ointment not only empowers, but obliges the Christian to offer up continual sacrifices to God: the sacrifice of his mind by faith; of his body, by penitence; of his property, by alms-deeds; of his resentment, by charity; of his ambition by humility; all oblations (says St. Paul) by which Almighty God is made propitious to us, and without which, Christianity is but the shadow of religion, "for by such sacrifices God's favour is obtained." Heb. xiii. I say more: because, in quality of Christians, we have it in our power to offer up, every day, the greatest of sacrifices, which is that of the body and blood of Christ Jesus. For, you offer, my brethren, laymen as you are, verily, and conjointly with the minister of the Lord, this divine sacrifice. And, hence, St. Leo rightly inferred, that the laity should deem themselves associates to the priests, and copartners and sharers in the priestly function. Now you cannot offer up this sacrifice with the priests, without being, in one sense, as priests yourselves. Whence it follows, that the character of a Christian makes you, in some sort, partake of the sacerdotal unction.

Further: in virtue of this character, you are made sacred, and devoted to God as his temples. No doctrine in the works of St. Paul more common than this. It is not, my brethren, (says this great apostle,) in temples made by the hands of men, but in those

which he hath himself erected in us, that our God abides; for, yourselves are the temples of the omnipotent God. Wherefore, beloved hearers, observe that the quality of being God's temples, is annexed solely, and in the strict sense, to the grace of baptism; and no grace but that of baptism, although it were as eminent as that of the angels, imparts the quality of being God's temples. The reason is this: we are not, properly, the temples of God, but inasmuch as we are capable, by partaking of his body, to receive this God of goodness and majesty, who makes so many sanctuaries and tabernacles of our breasts. Now, how are we enabled to receive in this manner, this God-man? By baptism. For although I had the sanctity of the glorified spirits, I could not, without the sacred character of baptism, appear at the table of our Saviour Christ, or partake of his sacrament. It is baptism, therefore, that first consecrates us temples to God; or rather, it is by baptism, and by the character it confers on us, that we are made and denominated the temples of God.

But what are these qualities all together, if compared with the titles, the glorious titles, of children of God, and members of God? For, these are directly the terms and expressions of the sacred penmen. Of us it is that St. John speaks, when he says, that all those who have been united in baptism, by the waters of regeneration, with our Lord Jesus Christ, and all those who have believed in him, and in his holy name, have acquired, from that moment, an incontestable right of being called, as they are, the children of God: "As many as received him, he gave them power to be made the sons of God, to them that believe in his name." John i. To the Corinthians it was that St. Paul said, "You are the body of Christ, and members of member." 1 Cor. ii. In short, beloved hearers, to set forth in this place the gifts descending from the heavenly Father, and by him communicated to the Christian soul, were an endless task, for which whole discourses would be insufficient. Let us pass on, therefore, to our obligation of holiness, an obligation arising from such holy qualities; and let us gather from thence a motive of shame, in the view of making it, at the same time, conducive to our edification.

2ndly. This, my brethren, as I said before, is what we are, and these are the respectable, the august characters, which his grace, in proportion to our state of life, imprints on our souls. But there must, moreover, an inference be drawn from these positions. Ob-

serve then the charity which the love of God ought to kindle in our breasts; how strict an obligation of fervour and zeal it lays us under; what integrity of manners is necessary to keep up the degree of glory to which grace hath raised us. Is it too much to require that we be perfect Christians, and that we fill up, not the extent, but in some shape, the immensity of this duty? In a word, can what is commanded by the divine law, how heroical soever, be too exalted for the children of God? Ah! my Lord, (cries St. Ambrose,) can we be thought deserving this great name, if, by an ungenerous, unseemly conduct, we degenerate and fall from the noble sentiments which the spirit of Christianity always inspires, and indulge the meannesses and sordid views which the spirit of the world never fails to suggest? And should we not for ever renounce the honour of belonging to you, if we were to content ourselves with moderate virtues, and pretend to confine them within narrow limits?

Thus it was, Christians, that the fathers of the church conceived this matter; and it was on this foundation that the apostle raised the strongest remonstrances which he made to the faithful. In his addresses to them, he used no appellation but that of saints; and when he wrote to the churches committed to his care, these were the inscriptions his epistles bore: "To the saints of the church at Corinth:" "To the saints who are at Ephesus;" for he supposed that the one could not be without the other, and that as to be consecrated to Almighty God was the essence of a Christian, so to be a Christian by profession was to be a saint. Wherefore he mostly made use of this argument, to induce the Christians to an inviolable purity both of body and mind, a purity by which he would have them be distinguished from the rest of mankind. "Know you not, my brethren, (says he,) that (by baptism) you are become the temple of God?" Now the temple of God should be clean and holy, and whoever profanes it, him God will undo.

Upon this passage, Zeno of Verona makes a remark equally solid and judicious. If this temple of God (says he) were perfect and finished in us who reside in these earthly abodes, such as it is in the blessed who inhabit the heavenly mansions, we should not need be at any pains for our sanctification. But because this structure, as long as we live, must be always increasing, but never completed, it is incumbent on us, in order to answer the views of God, who is the principal architect, to raise it continually, and

without interruption. This St. Paul hath nobly expressed in the following words: "In whom all the building, being framed together, groweth up into an holy temple in the Lord." Ephes. ii. For he says not, that Christ is the groundwork on which we are built and constructed, but on which we build and construct ourselves, in order to be a temple consecrated to the Lord. Now this temple cannot be edified, that is, erected, but by the holiness of life; and therefore a holy life, and an edifying life, are, in common use, synonymous terms, and of equal import. And the wonder is, that, if we be righteous, the temple of God is, at every instant, built and erected to our God in our persons.

True it is, (says the great apostle in another place,) as Christians you participate in the priesthood of Christ, and in the ministry of the priests; but, for that same reason, I conjure you to make an offering to God of your bodies, as so many sacrifices, holy and living, and agreeable in his eyes. For if the priests of the old law were obliged to be holy, because they were deputed to offer bread and incense; you, who in consequence of your call to Christianity, offer victims to God infinitely more noble; you, who every day offer him in the unbloody sacrifice of the altar, the body and blood of the immaculate Lamb; you, who offer him, if the scriptural argument be supposed consequential, the heart and affections, and every power of the soul: what ought you to be in his divine presence? "They offer the burnt-offering of the Lord, and the bread of their God, and therefore they shall be holy." Levit. xxi. To what doth this manner of reasoning extend, in our regard? And what necessity doth it not lay us under of leading an unspotted and chaste life; a life disengaged from the corruption of the world?

3rdly. This, beloved hearers, is enough for your encouragement; and yet this should make your blood run cold, if you are not affected with what I have advanced. For, the third article, with which I shall close this discourse, is, that the sins of Christians contract a particular malignity and guilt, which is that of sacrilege, and which renders them the more abominable in the sight of God. For, sacrilege, according to divines, is the profanation of a thing consecrated to God. Now whatever is in me, is consecrated to God by the sacrament of baptism; and all the sins which I shall commit henceforward, are so many crimes of self-profanation. Therefore all my sins include a kind of sacrilege of

which I stand guilty. But what is the nature of this sacrilege? It is the profanation of a thing not only consecrated to God, but united and corporated with him, as the Christian is, in consequence of his baptism, by the principles of his faith. Ah! my brethren, (says the great apostle, writing to the Corinthians, and justly exasperated at a similar abuse,) is it possible that I must come to that extremity? What! "Shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot?" 1 Cor. vi. What! shall I corrupt a heart, that should be the abode of my God—infect it with poison the most mortal, and defile it with iniquities of every kind?

However, beloved hearers, this is what we do, when we yield to the allurements and suggestions of sin; so that some divines, by straining the sense of the apostle's words, have doubted that Christ, how impeccable soever, became a sinner in Christians, and as many times, too, as they committed sin. I know that the church hath exploded this impious manner of speaking, so injurious to the sanctity of a God-man, and branded it as heretical. But this impious and heretical manner of speaking, is founded in this certain and indubitable truth, which they perverted: that whenever we sin, they are the brothers and members of Christ who sin: "Shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot?"

These, my brethren, are no exaggerations; nor is it one that I add, deploring the melancholy decay of Christianity, that, notwithstanding all this, there is nothing in it more common than sin. When the Almighty beheld the corruption and wickedness into which mankind, in the primitive ages of the world, had fallen, "it repented him," according to the language of scripture, "that he had made man." Gen. vi. The sight of so many and so great abominations made him look with horror on his own work, and resolve to destroy it. "I will destroy man," says he, "whom I have created." Gen. vi. Alas! my brethren, were these antediluvians more vicious than we are? And in their vices were they more criminal? Were they given to more fatal and scandalous doings, ruled by more sensual and unmanly appetites, subject to more gross and filthy voluptuousness? Were they more remarkable for injustice, enmity, revenge, perfidy, irregularity, debauchery? And were they, in these, or in anything else, more criminal than we are? Had they the same advantages by the incarnation of the

Son of God? Had Christ our Lord appeared before their eyes in the same flesh? Had he contracted with the same union, by the same grace, in the same sacraments? In a word, were they Christians like us? And was not that a solid and conclusive inference, which was made by Tertullian, and after him by all the other fathers, that in the new law, the law which unites us so closely with Christ, which so particularly devotes us to the service of God, which gives us so intimate a communication with God, and which makes us partake, in some measure, in the nature of God, our sins, if we be sinners, makes us much the more culpable at the divine tribunal, and much the more accountable to the divine justice?

What then have we not to fear? May it please kind heaven to avert the effect of so terrible a menace, and that we may have it in our power to prevent it? May it not, to use again the scripture phrase, repent the Almighty of what he hath done, by honouring us with so holy and glorious a character! May he not let his church, which he hath ransomed with his blood, and quickened with his Spirit, ever fall to destruction! What do I say, beloved hearers? He will never destroy her, she shall always subsist, she is built upon a solid and unshaken rock. But, content to single out some faithful souls, he will destroy the vast number of unworthy persons, who, instead of edification, give her trouble and affliction. He will exclude them from his kingdom as so many stumbling-blocks and scandalous nuisances, and will send them over to another land. He will preserve Christianity, but millions of Christians he will doom to perdition. He will let the torch of faith go out among us. Alas! is it not half extinguished already? Doth it not appear from daily experience, that the minds of men are more and more clouded, and by little and little sink utterly and irretrievably into the darkness of incredulity? For, this is the chastisement which they draw upon themselves from the hand of God. And how is it possible that faith should subsist, holy and sanctifying, with so much licentiousness, and should not clash with so great a perversion of Christian morals?

What then remains for us, O my God, but to have speedy recourse to your infinite mercy, and move you to compassion by resuming a pure and active faith? Culpable as we are, we are your children who implore you, and call upon you as their Father; we are the living members of your adorable Son, because we are

Christians. If we have but a few faint glimmerings of light to direct our steps, they may increase to refulgence by the assistance of your grace. Permit us not, O Lord, to be deprived of this only source left. Every other vengeance you shall please to exert, we deserve, and accept it from your paternal hand. But, O my God, support our faith, increase our faith, enliven our faith. Oh! reward it with bliss, and crown it with glory to all eternity!

SERMON X.

For the Fifth Sunday after Epiphany; or the Twenty-sixth after Pentecost.

THE INTERCOURSE BETWEEN THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE WICKED.

"*While the men slept, the enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat.*" MATT. xiii.

It is in the householder's field that these tares are sown among the good grain; and it is in the church of God that sinners live among the righteous, and that the one and the other are confounded together. It was in the night-time, and when all were asleep, that the enemy came to mar the field; and it is in the course of this mortal life, which, in our regard, is a time of obscurity, and as it were, a dark night, that the common enemy of mankind commits his ravages, and in the very bosom of the church keeps up that mixture of the impious and reprobate with God's elect. He doth not come, while we are upon the watch, have our eyes open, and are attentive to ourselves; but he lays hold of the critical moments, when we are inebriated with the deceitful pleasures of life, when we are lulled in the false delights and comforts of the world, when we are deluded by passion, and hindered from perceiving the damages he causes. "While the men slept." Thus it is, that the guileful spirit insinuates himself, deforms the minds of men with sin, and fills the Christian world with sinners. "The enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat." God might exterminate them all at once, with one motion of his arm; but he waits for the time of harvest, that is, the end of time, and his last

judgment, when he shall send his harvestmen to separate the tares from the good grain. But to speak in plain terms; when he shall send his angels—executioners of his will, and ministers of his justice, to make a distinction between the righteous and sinners; to place on the right hand, the predestinated righteous, and reprobated sinners on the left; to collect those together in his kingdom, and hurl these headlong into eternal flames: "Gather ye together the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn." Matt. xiii. This time, Christians, is not yet come; and we shall live among the ungodly, and the ungodly will live among us, until this separation is made between us. It is of the utmost importance, therefore, to know how you ought to demean yourselves in their regard, and what kind of intercourse you ought to hold with them.

To search into the secrets of Almighty God, in order to find out the end for which he suffers the ungodly among the righteous, would be to try (says St. Augustin) to search into a mystery far above our knowledge; a mystery which it is our duty to adore, without endeavouring to examine the nature of it. Almighty God permits the ungodly to subsist; and this we learn from experience: he permits them to subsist among the good and the predestinate; and this is too evident to be called in question. To know the reasons why he will have it so, is not within the narrow compass of our sphere; but to know the manner in which we should behave to the ungodly and libertines, is what greatly imports us, and requires our utmost regard and attention. Now of whom shall we learn this? Of God himself, who would in all things, but in this particularly, be the example and pattern of our conduct. God, beloved Christians, who is holiness itself, abides with sinners; but upon this I would observe two things, which ought to be two very important lessons for us. The first is, that he doth not abide with sinners, but by the necessity of his existence; the second, that by abiding with them, he at once provides for his own glory and for their salvation. Whereupon I lay down two great obligations, which nearly concern us, and which I intend shall make the division of this discourse.

First: God is with sinners only by the necessity of his existence; and we are bound to be with them only by the necessity of our state.

Secondly: God provides for his own glory and the salvation

of sinners, and by this means we ought to make our intercourse with them equally profitable to them and to ourselves.

In the first part, I shall show you the general obligation we are under of shunning all commerce with the unrighteous; and in the second, I shall lay before you the profit we must draw from it, whenever necessarily engaged therein. In two words, a commerce between the righteous and the unrighteous is generally dangerous for the righteous; but it may sometimes be to the advantage of the one and the other. The righteous, so far as it is profitable to themselves and the unrighteous in the way of salvation, they should turn it to advantage. This is the subject of the present discourse, and to which I entreat your attention.

Part I. To hear what the scripture says on this topic, beloved Christians, it would seem as if God was and was not at the same time with the ungodly; as if he deprived them and deprived them not of his divine presence. For thus it is that he expresses himself differently, according to the difference of the characters he assumes, and he wills to support in their regard. It is I (says he in one place) who fill heaven and earth; and let the sinner do what he will, he cannot escape me, or withdraw himself from before my eyes. Thus God is always present to the sinner, to observe and watch him, and enlighten his mind. But he says in another place: I repent my having created man, and for evermore I cast him off, because he is carnal in every respect. Here you see that God is separated from the sinner to take vengeance of him, and make him undergo condign punishment. Whither shall I go, O Lord, (says David,) and whither shall I fly from before thy face? If I go down into the darksome regions of hell, I there discover you exercising in person the rigour of your justice. Almighty God, therefore, (concludes St. Jerom,) dwells even with the reprobate. But, on the other hand, I hear Saul calling to Samuel, and declaring his grief to him, or rather desperation, for that the Almighty had forsaken him: "I am sorely distressed; for, the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me." 1 Kings xxviii. It follows, therefore, that it is not among the reprobate that God is to be looked for. How shall we reconcile all this? By reflecting (replies the angelical doctor, St. Thomas) that God, who is the holy of holies, is with the ungodly by the necessity of his existence, not by affection or inclination.

My meaning is this: he is with sinners by the necessity of his

existence, in that all his divine perfections engage him to be so: his wisdom, by which he governs and maintains in due order all his creatures, not excepting the most rebellious and outrageous sinners; his goodness, of which he imparts the effects to all his creatures, even to sinners; his omnipotence, which influences all creatures, and consequently sinners. All these attributes of the Creator, which bear relation merely to creatures, are such as all mankind share a part alike, the bad equally with the good; and it is by reason of these attributes that God is inseparable from the wicked. But, as I have said, they are attributes of necessity, which God himself supposing the benefit of creation, cannot dispense with, or set aside. For, beloved Christians, do but examine the inclinations of his heart, and you will find the case to be quite otherwise. Scarce is a man fallen into sin, but God breaks off all alliance with him, and by a necessary, though woful, consequence, all the communications of which his grace had been the bond. So that he is no longer with the sinner in any of those ways by which the bent and characteristics of his love are always perceived: that is, he is no longer with the sinner, either by a special protection, as he was with his own people in the wilderness; or by a communication of his divine gifts, as he is with all the righteous; or by an inward and mysterious union of his adorable sacrament, as he is in a singular manner with the Christian soul that receives it. All this, with respect to the sinner, is at an end: which made the divine Spirit say, that God no longer abides with sinners; and makes divines add, that if God (to suppose that possible which is impossible) could divest himself of his immensity, he would still remain present to a great number of persons to whom his grace attaches him, but that he would cease to be with sinners, because he no longer would have that necessity of ubiquitary existence and ubiquitary agency. Whence St. Chrysostom concludes, (and his thought is worthy of observation,) that the immensity of God, which is one of his noblest attributes, is, in one sense, burdensome to him, because it necessitates him to be unable totally to rid himself from the object of his aversion and indignation.

An admirable idea this, Christians, of the manner in which we ought to behave to the libertines of the age. For, what doth God require of us? That we behave to them as he himself behaves to them. How is it possible that we should propose to ourselves a better or more holy model? In the first place, therefore, he would

have us bear with them after his own example. And St. Augustin tells us, that this requisition is founded in reason, in that others were forced to bear with ourselves, when we went astray, and followed the vices and follies of the times. For which reason, (continues the same holy doctor,) we should always be careful to retain the remembrance of what we have been, in order to preserve a tender and charitable compassion for others in their evil state. It ought, however, to be remembered, that he doth not mean to say this commerce with the wicked should be pleasing to us, but only should exercise our patience. That is, we ought to bear it, but not love it, because we conform, by that means, to our rule, which is God.

There are, I allow, connexions and engagements with the unrighteous, which the divine law doth not only not command us, but positively forbids us to break, because they are so many indispensable duties; and this is what I call the necessity of our state, which bears analogy to the necessity of God's existence. Otherwise (according to St. Paul) "we must needs go out of the world." 1 Cor. v. For instance, must a father separate from his children, because he sees the irregularity of their behaviour; a wife from her husband, because he leads a libertine life; an inferior from a superior, because he is a witness to his scandalous conduct? No, to be sure; the law of duty, dependence, and subjection, positively forbids it: and in that case we may say, that the mixture of the righteous and the wicked is authorized by God, forasmuch as he is the author of the conditions which are the ground-work of such a communication. All this is true; but, except what is restrained by necessity and justice, when the matter is left to our own free option, to seek the ungodly, and keep up a voluntary intercourse with them—worldly and profane friendships, familiarity for which there is no pretext but pleasure alone, and which no reason can authorize or justify, I say, is to act in direct opposition to the orders of God; and what I say is perfectly agreeable to what the apostle said to the Christians of Thessalonica, "We command you to withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly." 1 Thess. iii. Upon this account it was, that the royal prophet made a conscience of it, and a religious point. "I have not sitten (says he) with vain persons, neither will I go in with dissemblers; I have hated the congregation of evil-doers." Ps. xxv. My constant maxim hath been to avoid all communication with the abet-

tors of vice and folly, and never to mix or associate with those who prize themselves for committing iniquity; to love their persons, because charity commands me to do so, but to hate their meetings, to shun their intrigues, to abhor their converse, because the superior charity I owe to God and myself, forbids me to have any part therein.

This, I say, beloved hearers, is that which Christian prudence dictates, and that to which it indispensably obligeth us; to avoid, so far as our station will permit it, the company of the wicked. And, indeed, God hath inspired us with a secret horror of it. You are my people, (say he, to the children of Israel, leading them to the land of Canaan,) you are my people, and I have chosen you, among all the people who inhabit the earth, that you may be especially devoted to me; but upon that very account, you shall not hold correspondence with that infidel people, you shall not enter into any alliance with them, nor shall any marriage be lawfully contracted between you and them. St. Augustin asks, what can be the reason of all this? Might not an intercourse with foreigners have been of singular advantage to the Israelites, in order to their settling in the promised land? Worldly policy, very likely, would have closed with this opinion; but God, whose holy and adorable views are raised infinitely above those of men, was pleased, in his wisdom, to make policy give way to the interests of religion: "Take heed, lest thou enter into covenant with the inhabitants of that land." Exod. xxxiv. These are the express words of the law; and you shall see, beloved Christians, whether this prohibition was useless and ill-founded. For, hearken to what St. Paul says. I have admonished you, (says he, writing to the Corinthians,) and specified to you in one of my letters, that you must not have any kind of engagement, either with the unchaste or voluptuous, or with defamers and calumniators, or with any person whatsoever, who may corrupt you, or be an occasion of scandal to you. Although he were your brother by every tie of inclination and friendship, you are forbidden to hold any communication with him: "I have written to you, that if any man who is called a brother, be a fornicator, or a railer, or a drunkard, with such a one not to take meat." 1 Cor. v.

God, by separating us from the wicked, would have us do now, what he himself will one day do, and thereby antedate the general resurrection and general judgment. When the Son of God shall

come to judge the world, the reprobate and the righteous will arise at the same time; but the reprobate will not be risen together with the righteous, because, at the moment of resurrection, the righteous will be separated from the reprobate, by that terrible discrimination of which David speaks, and of which the angels will be the executioners: "Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous." Ps. i. What, then, shall we infer from this? That the good shall live on the earth, with respect to the wicked, in the order in which they shall rise from the dead and receive judgment; that is, they sever themselves (if I may so express it) from sinners, and begin, even in this life, to take their rank.

Accordingly, in this consists the perfection and glory of the righteous upon earth; and such is the idea which the scripture gives us of it. For when Almighty God commands Joshua to put Acham to death, (a scandalous man in the midst of the people,) he expresseth himself in these words only: "Arise, and sanctify the people." Joshua vii. And what, O Lord, shall I do for that end? replies Joshua. Thou shalt exterminate that sacrilegious wretch, Acham; for so long as he remains among the tribes, I cannot myself remain among them: but, cut off for ever from among the living that vicious soul, and the whole people shall be sanctified. One would imagine, beloved Christians, that the separation of the wicked was, in some measure, a sacrament of expiation for the righteous. In truth, this alone were enough to sanctify whole families, whole communities, whole religious orders. Turn out of the house a good-for-nothing servant that infects it, and you will make it a house of piety. Remove from a religious community a certain person of a turbulent spirit, that destroys the harmony which ought to reign in it, and you will make it a congregation of saints. Banish from the prince's court some deists who may have sway and power in it, and you will make it a Christian court. There is in Paris, a certain man, who hath ruined more souls than the devil, with all his wiles, will ever be able to do; and you yourselves know certain women, whose artful ways have made more libertines, than the most contagious lessons of those who, in times past, delivered lectures on debauchery. Take away, therefore, a small number of these men and women, and you will re-establish, almost universally, the worship of God. Now this retrenchment would not be impossible, was the interest of God as much respected

as that of men. Have you never noticed, beloved Christians, a particular thing, which the evangelist St. John remarks, speaking of the last supper which our blessed Saviour ate with his disciples, before his death? At the very time that the traitor, Judas, went forth to put his dark design into execution, our blessed Lord fell into a kind of extasy, saying, "Now the Son of man is glorified." John xiii. Whence accrued this glory to him? St. Augustin asks. Not from the beatific vision of God: that he had from the first instant he became man. Neither was it from the raising of his body from the dead: the time for that was not yet come. It accrued to him from the withdrawing of that traitor, who had till then been in his presence with the other disciples. And this reason is given for it by the text: "Therefore, when he went forth, Jesus said, now the Son of man is glorified." As long as Judas remained in his company, it was in some sort, a dishonour to him; but perceiving he was separated from him, though such separation was to be followed by all the ignominy of the cross, he thought himself, notwithstanding, glorified by it. Now if the glory of our Redeemer was not complete, while a reprobated man was in his company, judge, beloved hearers, whether you be holy, righteous, and pleasing in the presence of God, while you herd with sinners, and voluntarily pass your days in the midst of them.

And St. Thomas tells us, that this is the reason why the church cuts off certain persons from her communion. By issuing out excommunication, she separates the good grain from the bad, with a view to retain to herself the one, and reject the other; whereby she instructs us in our duty, and lets us know what it is incumbent on us to do. You would not keep away from the ungodly: she keeps them, therefore, away from you. For you must not imagine that her sole meaning is to punish them, by taking from them the common advantages of society. Excommunication imports two things; a punishment for the culpable, and a law for the innocent. The punishment is, that the church forbids the sinner to have any more communication with the faithful; and the law is, that at the same time she commands the faithful to hold no more communication with the sinner. But can we thence infer, that the company of no sinners is forbidden us, save those who are struck with the anathematical thunder of the church? No, Christians: though a thing be not forbidden in formal terms by the church, it were illogical reasoning to infer from thence, that it is allowed. There are

laws of a higher order, and more general, to which we are bound to pay obedience. In virtue of her censures, the church doth no more than prohibit an intercourse with scandalous persons who rebel against her; but without rebelling, it is enough that they are scandalous, to make us conclude, independently of the prohibitions of the church, that we are under a strict obligation of shunning them. It would be a pitiful way of reasoning, that because the church hath revoked the penalties pronounced against those who associate with excommunicated persons, she, therefore, approves of such connexions, and of the keeping such company.

My meaning is this, and pray take notice: it is very requisite you should thoroughly comprehend what I am going to say. In former times, according to the rigour of the canon law, none of the faithful could ever have any dealing with a man cut off from the communion of the church, without incurring the same censure. This law is universal. For important reasons, however, made out in œcumenical councils, the church hath relaxed in this rigour, and forbids us only to have communication with those whom she hath publicly, and by name excommunicated. Can it, therefore, be inferred, that we may converse indifferently with all sorts of persons, though corrupt and dangerous, under colour that they are not stigmatized by the church? It is a great mistake, beloved Christians. The church may repeal her own laws; she may change her customs; but all this must be without prejudice to the law of God, which is irreversible and invariable. Now the law of God is, that except in the necessary engagements of my state, I refrain and keep away from all company, in which the innocence of my soul might run the hazard of being shipwrecked. If I seek it voluntarily, and by free choice, it is very true the thunders of the church will not fall on me upon that account, because the church is willing to treat me with that indulgence. But all her indulgence cannot hinder me, from being, by that means, a scandal to my brethren, and from being, by that means, an enemy to myself, by working my own destruction and wo.

1st. I say, beloved Christians, that to herd with libertines and impious men, knowing them to be such, is to despise God. And, in reality, what do you mean by a contempt of God, if not to join and unite with his enemies? And who are the enemies of God but sinners, especially certain declared sinners? What would you think of a son who should cordially and affectionately side with the

persecutions of his father, with those who made base attempts on the rights and honour of his father, with those who made open war against his father? Would you not hold him in the utmost abhorrence, and look upon him as a monster of nature? Now this is what you do by associating and living with wicked men. So long as they lead a sinful life, there must subsist an irreconcilable hatred between God and them. Examine the scriptures, and read the reproach which was made to Josaphat, king of Juda, in other respects a religious prince. An alliance was settled between him and Achab, king of Israel. There were reasons of state which induced him to enter into this alliance, and it passed the council-board without one dissenting voice. Nevertheless, the council was in this condemned by Almighty God. Thou art, O king, (says Jehu, taking all the liberty of a prophet,) a prevaricator: "Shouldst thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? Therefore didst thou deserve wrath." Paral. xix. The good works of Josaphat, and the sincerity of his heart, pleaded his excuse. But, beloved Christians, what can *you* allege? To say nothing of the injury you offer to God, how can you excuse the scandal you give to the servants of God, in the church of God? Tell me, is it not scandalous, to see you every day in the most suspected places in town, in company where all notions of shame are laid aside, where an indecent vein of humour is admired, where the most pernicious maxims are adopted, and where the sacred rules of modesty are too often disregarded; to see you with men of no religion, and with women of lost reputations, in places where licentiousness reigns without bounds, and the most deadly contagion is spread? What can we think of it? What can we say of it? Nay, what hath not already been thought and said of it?

2ndly. And tell me not, that you know how to look to your own preservation, and that notwithstanding whatever the world may think and say of it, the testimony of your own conscience pleads in your behalf, and that is enough. Give ear, dear brethren, to what St. Jerom hath written thereupon to a Roman lady. You must be but superficially conversant (says he) in the duties of a Christian life, to express your thoughts in that manner. And do not you know, that in point of conduct you must give an account to Almighty God not only of what you do, but of what they say of you? that it is not sufficient to set your own conscience at ease, but that, moreover, you are under an obligation of satisfying the

consciences of other people? that St. Paul, who knew more of the matter than you do, in regulating his conversation, considered men as well as God, not imagining it could be innocent, so long as men could take offence at it, and acknowledging full well he became guilty in God's presence, by not taking pains to be irreproachable in the sight of men? Thus spoke St. Jerom; and he concluded by setting the example of the apostle, who would not eat of certain meats, lest by so doing he should scandalize the faithful! Alas! (says the same holy doctor again,) the company of men is as necessary as food; and how can we be too careful to shun those scandalous connexions, which hurt the purity of our conscience, afford room for numberless suspicions, and are made the usual topic of detraction, whereas St. Paul abstained from flesh, and even had a horror of it, so long as it might give occasion of scandal to the humblest Christian?

3rdly. But, loved Christians, to pass over the scandal, and insist only on what more nearly concerns ourselves. How is it possible to hold familiar communication with lewd and libertine livers, and retain a pure and chaste heart? Can you reasonably hope to breathe an air entirely infected, and not feel the effects of its infection? And would it not be the highest presumption to think yourselves free from a danger which God hath forbidden as much as the evil itself? If that were the case, the prophets and apostles would not have been more strongly confirmed in grace than you are; and this advantage you would have over them, that they at all times disliked the company of the ungodly, because they supposed it dangerous for them, as St. Jerom witnessed of Ezechial, who in that view, withdrew from all the rest of the people, and passed his days in holy retirement, whereas you, voluntarily and fearless, remain among them, as though you possessed an infallible antidote against sin. But if you do not, how rash must you be, to run a greater hazard than those saints of the highest order durst ever run! To expose yourselves on many occasions for which they thought their strength sufficient! To live in security, though they were always in fear and trembling! Why did God so strictly forbid the Jews to mix and traffic with foreigners? Because he foresaw that in such alliances and negotiations, their fall and ruin would be almost inevitable. And in reality, had they ever commerce with any nation, whose impiety and superstitions they did not in course of time adopt? "They were mingled among the

Gentiles, and learned their works." Ps. cv. Why did the church, from her first establishment, oppose among the Christians the contracting of marriage with infidel people? For thus it is St. Jerom understands the words of St. Paul: "Be ye not yoked together with unbelievers." 2 Cor. vi. Because she considered the danger and ruin to which such alliances and engagements would necessarily expose the faith of Christians. And why did our Saviour give her such a power as would seem to destroy all the rights of humanity? Be attentive, I pray you. This will surprise you; but I shall advance nothing that is not founded in holy writ, and the sacred canons. I say, why did our Saviour give his church power to render null, or at least with respect to its chief obligations, the most authentic of all the contracts that are celebrated among mankind, a lawful marriage solemnly ratified between two pagans, one of whom receives baptism, and the other persists in the practice of idolatrous worship, but because in this junction of heterogeneous religions, that of the true and living God would be exposed to danger? It cannot be doubted (says Tertullian) that the faith is gradually obliterated by a frequent communication with infidels. This is what that doctor, so zealous for strictness of discipline in the church, represented some time before his death to his own wife, in order to dissuade her, according to his maxims, from a second marriage, at least in order to make her understand the obligation she was under of never forming such a connexion with a pagan. Allow me to borrow the same thought, and apply it to my subject. It cannot be doubted that the piety of a soul the most religious must be considerably hurt by a friend who leads a loose and disorderly life, and is continually in your presence. You are the depository of his sentiments, you hear him talk, you see him act, and you insensibly accustom yourself to think like him, to talk like him, and to act like him. This, it is true, is not done at first, without some repugnance, and some struggle; but that which you could not think of seriously without horror, begins at last not to create in you such displeasure, and forthwith is pleasing to you, and bears you away. It cannot be doubted that the reserve, the prudence, the good sense and virtue of a young person must totter in time, and receive daily stabs, by those particular interviews and privacies, in which he unbosoms himself to a worldling, who always inspires him with his own hellish principles, and in a few moments destroys the whole fruit of a pious education, and the

constant labour of many years. Hence that maxim so universally admitted, confirmed by so many proofs, and so common: tell me your company, and I'll tell what you are.

Be that as it may, beloved hearers, the church hath done all in her power to hinder the intercourse of the ungodly from being prejudicial to her children: and what have you done to second her cares? Perhaps you fancy, that the company of a man immersed in debauchery, and addicted to pleasure, is not so much to be apprehended, as that of an infidel. But I, on the contrary, maintain that a thousand idolaters together, conspired to pervert you, and work your ruin, would not make so great an impression on you, as one libertine with whom you are united by the ties of friendship and good fellowship. Job preserved his innocence in the midst of false gods, and of those who offered them incense and adoration. Lot had fallen in Sodom amidst his fellow citizens. I proceed farther, and I even hold, that the joint efforts of all the devils together against you, would not be so dangerous and tempting a lure, as the sight and presence of this one scandalous sinner. But I can judge of your thoughts by the life you lead. You do not fear these partizans of vice, because you are, yourselves, perhaps as much already infected with it as they are; and they cannot harm you, because you have received from it all the detriment with which you were threatened. The oracle of the Lord must needs be verified in this manner; for it would have been mistaken, if living and conversing as you do with the wicked, you had preserved your innocence, and led a Christian life.

Alas! Christians, we are astonished, at this day, to see the world so corrupted as it is. We know not to what to attribute the general laxity of manners among our youth; we blush for so many persons of the sex who blush at nothing; we are amazed to hear of the strange disorders that break forth every day in the marriage state; we learn with indignation to what a pitch impiety is risen in the courts of princes; shall I say it? we behold with horror vice gliding into the very sanctuary, and cleaving to the very ministers of the altar. Of all which the most usual spring is the company and converse of this profane world. This is what serves as a bait for every immoderate desire, what fans the fire of irregular passions, what forms iniquitous schemes and intrigues, and what crowns with success the most abominable undertakings. This is what makes the mighty yield, what infatuates the sage,

and what corrupts the virgin. Let the father withhold his youthful son from another young man, who is too assiduous in seeking his company, and he shall see him walk in the right path. Let the mother forbear to receive, or to pay, certain visits, and the daughter, her constant companion, shall become a perfect model of virtue. Let the Christian, of what denomination soever, break with his friend, and I will almost answer for his salvation. But how! say you. To forsake a friend! Yes, you must quit him; and although it were your eye you must pull it out. Why should you cultivate a friendship so much to your own disadvantage? And why should you set by that which must end in your own reprobation? Hath not our Saviour expressly told you, that whoever should not hate his own kindred, his brother and sister, nay, his father and mother, would be unworthy of him: that is, whoever should not be disposed to relinquish his nearest and dearest friends, a brother or a sister, a father or a mother, so soon as some scandal might be apprehended, would be guilty thenceforward, in the eyes of God, and for ever excluded from the kingdom of heaven? Now if I am bound to behave in this manner to the authors of my life, whenever I find that they are an obstacle to my salvation, have those false friends, the accomplices of my iniquities, a right to complain, when to keep from falling into the mighty gulf, toward which they are leading me, I disengage myself from them, and disclaim all farther association with them? And should they rally me, should they expostulate with me, should they use me contemptuously, ought I to hearken rather to them, than to God himself? No, no, I ought to love nothing to the prejudice of my soul; and as nothing less than the interests of God and salvation of my soul is at stake, it is wholly sufficient. Every thing else is indifferent to me.

There are, however, beloved Christians, friendships which necessary engagements oblige us to keep; and, as God, by the necessity of his existence, which includes a necessity of abiding with sinners, is not at a loss to draw his own glory from it, and to employ for their conversion the presence of his divinity; so is it our duty to be of service to the ungodly, who live among us, and to draw advantage from the ungodly, among whom, through the necessity of our state, we live. Another obligation, which I shall make the subject of the second part.

PART II. There is nothing more certain, beloved Christians,

than that although sin be essentially injurious to the majesty of God, it is conducive, neverthless, to his greater glory. God would not suffer it (as St. Chrysostom observes) if it were not capable of contributing thereto by its very malignity; and he would sooner annihilate all the sinners in the world, than behold one of them, from whom no tribute of honour could be drawn. As soon as a man commits sin, (according to an excellent remark of St. Augustin,) he hurts himself, but doth not hinder the goodness of God from having effect. For God, who is admirable in his works, can turn man's defects to advantage; neither doth he suffer them, but because he can improve them to good purpose. It is in this (continues this holy doctor, who treats this point with amazing ability,) that the wisdom of the Creator is particularly conspicuous, and seems to surpass even his omnipotence, because it is the nature of omnipotence to create what is good, and of wisdom to find what is good in evil, by referring it to God. Now this referring evil to God, the supreme Being, hath something much more wonderful in it, than the production of created beings, which hath more the appearance of being natural to him. It should seem (adds he) that God takes pleasure in doing the very reverse by the wicked, in the use of things. For as their evil doings consist in the ill use they make of his creatures, which are good; in like manner, his justice is seen in the good use he makes of their wills, which are bad. A strange opposition between God and the sinner! God himself, (says St. Augustin again,) although he be the original and primitive purity, is not pure with respect to the wicked, forasmuch as they make him, every day, by blaspheming and outraging him, the object of impurity. Whereas sin, which is substantially impurity, is purified, as I may say, with regard to God, forasmuch as it becomes the cause of his glory. All these are sublime thoughts, and perfectly worthy of their author.

1st. But he stops not there. To come to the proof, and make good minutely these general propositions, only observe, (continues he,) my brethren, how all the wicked, scandalous, and reprobate people in the world, concur admirably, and contrary to the intentions of mankind, to glorify God. Consider, first, all those who are deprived of the light of the gospel, and left destitute of the gifts of faith. Cast your eyes upon idolatrous pagans, obstinate heretics, rebellious schismatics, and obdurate Jews. Doth not Almighty God make use of them for the carrying of his great

designs into execution? Is he not wont to make use of infidels to work the wonders of his grace, and to make them known? What is there greater, or more effectual, in order to establish the truth of religion, than a world converted by twelve fishermen? Is he not wont to make use of heretics for the explaining of doctrinal points, and to confirm us more and more in the true belief? Never was the faith more clearly expounded, than when it was attacked; nor hath anything ever afforded more room for sifting out and discovering the truth than error. Is he not wont to make use of schismatics as a plain and obvious proof of the perpetuity and unshaken firmness of his church? She always, notwithstanding the division of her members, maintains herself in the integrity of one body, while the factions that successively make head against her, successively perish and die away. Do not the Jews, that sad remnant of God's people, that weak posterity of a well-beloved nation, seem to remain upon earth only in order to serve as witnesses to our Saviour, ascertaining his person by their scriptures, verifying his mysteries by their prophecies, and revealing his gospel by a comparison of it with their law? It is an ill grain sown in God's field; but observe how many different ways it conduces to his glory.

The case is similar with respect to the ungodly, in a general sense. God can convert them to a thousand purposes, in order to make manifest his divine attributes, and for the general good of man. They are the scourges of his justice, to punish sinners; they are the instruments of his mercy, to try the saints. When Jerusalem was ransacked under the command of Titus, it was God that made use of Roman ambition to exercise his vengeance on the Jews. It is true, the ambition of the Romans was criminal, but the chastisement of God was just. What did the bloody tyrants and persecutors of the Christian name do heretofore? By trying to destroy the faithful, they multiplied them, gave confessors to Jesus Christ, filled the church with martyrs, and peopled heaven with the predestinate.

It is, therefore, true, that Almighty God makes use of sinners for the increase of his own glory, and for our salvation; and that he never wants means to make himself proper amends for the injury offered him by the malignity of men and sin, which he repairs by sin itself, and by the malignity of those who commit it. This is the model we are bound to follow, if the necessity of our

state engage us in a communication with the ungodly: at least after the example of Almighty God, it imports us to turn it to our own advantage. This we may do, when we do not seek them, and when it is not incumbent on us to shun their converse. For as God (says St. Ambrose) finds wherewithal in sinners to display the glory of his infinite perfections, we find in them wherewithal to acquire and practise the most eminent virtues. And, indeed, let the sinner with whom I live, do what he will, if I am really influenced by the Spirit of God, it is a wholesome lesson for me, and a fair opportunity of becoming a saint. If he raise persecution against me, he furnishes me with matter for patience; if he declare himself my enemy, he purifies my charity; if he be hard upon me, it is a fit subjection for mortification. Doth his pride make him look down upon me with scorn, contempt, or haughtiness? He teaches me to endeavour at a modest comportment. Doth he suffer his temper to rise into a storm, and the workings of his wrath to becloud his reason? He proves that I am meek and humble of heart. Doth he fall into shameful excesses and sins? He moves my compassion, and excites my zeal. I say more; and what I say is taken from St. Gregory. According to the laws by which all sublunary things are governed, never could a righteous man arrive to Christian perfection, if God, by a disposition of his holy providence, did not sometimes oblige him to pass his days with sinners. The reason is this: it is in such a society and intercourse he must learn to wear off human imperfections. And how could he (says the same father) become a proficient in the way of virtue, were there no such thing as a sinner upon earth? In what could he practise that heroical charity, of which Jesus Christ hath set us the example, and which he commands in such strong terms, if there were no offence or injustice, no slander or calumny, to be forgiven? Where would be the merit of perseverance and constancy, if there were no contradictions and crosses to be borne, no sarcasms and taunts to be endured, no attacks and snares of libertines to be withstood?

There is nothing more certain, dear Christian hearers, than that if we had the zeal we ought to have for our salvation, and were willing and desirous to make greater progress in the way of piety and evangelical perfection, one of the most powerful means of raising our hearts to God, would be the presence and sight of so many sinners, with whom we have, one way or other, continual

dealings. What motive of gratitude to the Father of mercies, for keeping us clear of all those crimes, to which we are witnesses, and which we lament! What inducement to humility, and a continual attention to ourselves, since we are, ourselves liable to fall into them every moment; to charity for our neighbour, since even in his iniquity he is God's minister, and the executioner of his decrees, to chastise and reform us; to penance and resignation, since the more we are thwarted, the more we may make atonement and satisfaction to the divine justice! But what comes to pass? That we invert the whole order of things, and turn these means of salvation into causes of our perdition. The intent of divine Providence is, that our intercourse with sinners should make us holy, and yet it is the very thing that perverts us. Almighty God draws from it his glory, and we convert it to our ruin. By it he requires more and more of that external and accidental holiness which we wish him every day, and we become by it more and more criminal every day.

Give me leave, Christians, to unbosom myself, and lay before you my most secret and hidden sentiments. It wounds my heart when I hear, at the sacred tribunal of penance, a man of the world bewail his situation, as if he would vindicate the evil practices of his life, by the necessity under which he lies of remaining in the midst of a wicked world, and of keeping up connexions and cultivating friendships, which it is not in his power to break; or when I hear a woman of the world lament her sad condition, and tell me, in doleful accent, that all the disorders of her soul arise from her being, by duty, engaged to a husband without religion, without check to his passions, without restraint in his debaucheries. What answer can I make them? I pity their case, not on account of the supposed unhappiness of their state, inasmuch as it is the state to which it hath pleased the divine Providence to call them; but on account of the ill use they make of their state, contrary to the views and designs of God, who placed them in it. I pity this woman, not on account of what she suffers, but of the manner in which she suffers, as she doth not reflect, or doth not know, that this husband is a chosen means in the unerring council of eternal wisdom, to try her faithfulness, and save her soul. Now, if this be true, (which is the opinion of the best divines,) is she not extremely to be pitied, to suffer all the inconveniencies of a hard and disagreeable

fellowship, without the merit of it; to turn the remedy into poison, and God's graces into occasions of offending him?

But if I were placed in another state, I should labour without difficulty to save my soul. So you say, beloved hearer; but I can assure you, that in this respect you are much mistaken, for without God, you cannot labour to save your soul. Now God will not have you to labour for it in any other place, or by any other means. This is the way he hath marked out for you. But you urge, it is impossible to resist so many, and such bad examples, and remain unhurt by their contagion. A mistaken notion, beloved Christians. It is impossible, when you throw yourselves into the danger, against the orders of Almighty God, and in opposition to your state. But if it be for the honour of God, by the call of God, according to the will of God; if it be by the rules of evangelical prudence, and the wise precautions it requires, that which for others would be contagious, is no longer so for you; and that which would overwhelm them in the depth of wickedness, will raise you to a sublime degree of holiness. For it belongs to the providence of God to afford you, on such occasions, assistance, strength, and understanding; and this he always grants. Now if, with the assistance of God, the lights he communicates, and the force and vigour which his grace diffuses through a Christian soul, you stand unshaken and firm amidst the throng of sinners; if you resist their solicitations; if you are not staggered, either by their promises or by their menaces, or by their flattery or by their scorn; if, notwithstanding the headlong torrent of example, which carries others away by millions, you keep attached to the rules of duty, and to the observance of the law, in the various conflicts, which, on that account, you are necessitated to maintain, what spiritual riches do you heap up in the presence of God! and with what speed do you make progress in the rough and thorny way of righteousness! The height of the wicked man's iniquity, according to the testimony of the prophet, is "to have dealt unjustly in the land of saints." Isaias xxvi. It redoubles his malignancy, and disqualifies him for seeing the glory of the Lord, and for being received in the heavenly mansions: "He shall not see the glory of God." Isaias xxvi.

Thus spoke Isaias; and thence, by a consequence not less evident, I conclude, that the height of the good man's holiness is, to be steadily righteous in the midst of sinners. Moses, in the court

of an infidel prince, had always, according to a fine expression of St. Paul, the invisible present to his mind. St. Lewis, on the throne, shut his eyes to all the splendor and magnificence of human pomps; neither did he, amidst the licentiousness of arms, and din of war, swerve an iota from the obedience he owed the King of kings. Men, united by the ties of interest, with men devoid of faith or honesty, have kept their hands clean of all injustice, refusing to take part in their evil doings. Women, in houses where God's worship was scarcely thought of, have proceeded incessantly in their pious practices, and paying no regard to what was said, and to provoking usage of every kind, made no abatement in their holy zeal, or defalcation in the works of godliness. This is what enhances the value of their faithfulness, and gives it a peculiar characteristic. This is the reason why they shall receive so glorious a praise from the mouth of our Saviour, and why he will tell them what he told his apostles: "Ye are they who continued with me in my temptations." Luke xxii. While others forsook me, betrayed my cause, committed outrage against my name, transgressed my law, ye are they who walked with steadfastness in my footsteps. To remain with me, and be steadfast, when there is nothing to suffer for me, when no inducement to quit me offers, when everything conspires to draw the hearts of Christians to my service, is the effect of ordinary virtue. But to remain with me, and be steadfast in temptation, when many victories must be obtained to that end; to remain with me, and be steadfast, notwithstanding so many trials, oppositions, and contradictions; notwithstanding custom and all worldly considerations, is a manifest token of a lively faith, a solid attachment, a pure love, an heroical perseverance, and for which I accordingly reserve all my rewards: "Ye are they who continued with me in my temptations."

2ndly. Would you have thought, beloved Christians, that the sinners would have procured such great advantages for the righteous, in things respecting their salvation? But learn, moreover, how the righteous must, on their part, contribute towards the salvation of sinners. We find in Daniel a contest of a very singular nature between two angels. This contest is not, as Abbè Rupert would have it, between a beatified angel and one of the reprobated spirits; but according to the interpretation of all the fathers, and particularly St. Jerom, between two blessed angels that enjoy the same glory, and pay attendance at the throne of God. The first,

which is the tutulary angel of Judea, is desirous that the Jews may quit the kingdom of Persia with all possible speed, because they are in danger of corrupting their morals, by a communication with the idolatrous people of Babylon; but, on the contrary, the guardian angel of Babylon begs, that they may not seek another land, because by their conversation and good example, they may edify the people, and bring them over to the religion of the true God. In fact, three kings of that great empire had openly renounced the worship of idols, and offered incense to the God of Israel, as it is reported in the Book of Esdras. Would you wish to know what this disagreement of these two ministers of heaven implied? Two wills in God, (replies St. Gregory,) but conditional wills, which perfectly accord, however dissonant they may appear: one, which obliges the righteous to fly the company of sinners, and this we learn from the prayer of the angel that spoke in favour of the Jewish people; the other, which requires that the righteous co-operate to the salvation of sinners, whenever they happen by a lawful engagement to be detained among them; and in this view it was, that the angel of Persia solicited for the Babylonians. For this, beloved Christians, is the rule we must follow. God will not have his own presence or ours be unprofitable to the ungodly, but he wills that we shall labour for their conversion. There is no doubt but they are the objects of his care; and because it is impossible he should cease to be with sinners, so it is impossible he should cease to use fit means for the reformation of their lives. He invites them by his promises, he prevails with them by his benefits, he warns them by his threats, he urges them by his chastisements; his wisdom, his goodness, his justice, his divine perfections are employed in this. And what ought particularly to surprise you is, that notwithstanding his prescience of the future and infallible loss of many, yet he is aiding them with the same assiduity and care, as if he had no foreknowledge of their misfortune. An admirable example this, which represents to us one of the most essential, and, at the same time, least known duties of a Christian!

For as it behoves us, beloved Christians, to profit by sinners, so we should, if it lies in our power, be useful to them. This duty is both general and particular. Take notice: a general duty, which regards indiscriminately all mankind, and which the law of charity imposes on us all. The Holy Ghost tells us, that Almighty God "hath commanded every one concerning his neigh-

bour as necessity requires, or opportunity offers. Hence arises the rigorous obligation of affording relief to the poor in their misery. Now if charity obligeth us to compassionate the temporal necessity of the poor, how much greater an obligation must it lay on us of compassionating the spiritual necessity of a sinner! If, in the distresses of our brother, where the point is concerning the body only, and a mortal life, we cannot forsake him, and neglect to relieve him, without forfeiting the love of God by losing charity to our neighbour, how is it possible we should preserve both the one and the other, while we suffer souls, redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ, to perish through our fault? While we withhold assistance from them, which we do not want the means of procuring them, and which might probably save them from eternal death and damnation? While we neglect to give them advice, instruction, and example, which might recall them from devious paths, direct their steps, and put them in the way of a blessed immortality? For among these sinners, (as St. Augustin observes,) there are whom God hath predestinated to be one day numbered among his friends and saints. We do not know them, nor do they know themselves, because at present the elect and reprobate are indiscriminately blended together. But this is the reason why our charity should be universal, and why our care should extend to all, that the views of God may be accomplished, and that they in whom he intends to work the wonders of his grace, may not be destitute of assistance, and the means of salvation he had prepared for them. For this reason it was, that the apostles exhorted the faithful to edify, by their conduct, idolaters and pagans. For this reason it was, that St. Peter expressly recommended to good livers so to demean themselves, that "evil doers, by the good works which they should behold, might glorify God." 1 Pet. ii. But we are prepossessed with a false maxim upon this head, supposing it sufficient to employ our thoughts about ourselves. We say, like Cain, when the Lord demanded of him an account of Abel, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Gen. iv. Am I obliged to watch over this or that person? With what authority am I invested, or what have I to do but to lead a life of ease and comfort, without examining how others live? There are, it must be owned, rules of prudence to be observed. It is not proper, as did the servants in the gospel, to pluck the tares up by the roots, and inconsiderately follow the impulse of a blind and precipitate zeal, regardless of

time, place, and circumstances. This laudable prudence, however, when well employed, is apt to degenerate into false wisdom, dastardly timidity, worldly consideration, slothful indifference, and prevarication.

In regard to the particular duty belonging to certain states, tell me whose duty it is to correct a vicious youth, borne away by the fire of unruly passions, if not a vigilant and wise father's? to correct a girl attached to the ways of the world, and engaged in worldly intrigues, if not a careful and regular mother's? to correct servants that curse and swear, and are given to drunkenness, if not a master's on whom they depend, and who possesses the means of putting a stop to their wickedness? Whose business is it to reform the abuses that creep even into the church of God, and spread among Christians, if not Christ's ministers? to clear the town of vices and disorders that prevail in it, if not the magistrate's? to regulate the court, and make holiness reign in it, if not the prince's? But where do we see this zeal, and how shall we have it for others, since we want it for ourselves? But what is more strange, and what ought still more to put us to confusion, is, that in every other thing but that which I am speaking of, we are never wanting in zeal for the amendment of our neighbour. Every the least occasion excites it to a degree of violence. Let a young gentleman betray a little hebetude of mind, and rather a slowness of capacity, in the course of his education; let a young lady be heedless about her walk, her air, her dress, her mien; let a servant be guilty of some forgetfulness, or a slight failure in the execution of his duty, it is quite sufficient to make the most sharp and bitter reproaches ring in their ears. But when the point relates only to the salvation of their souls, these zealots in worldly matters are no way affected, and scarce do they deign sometimes to bestow a thought upon it.

This duty is still more incumbent on libertine livers themselves, and on sinners, whenever they have the good fortune to see the wretchedness of their state, and to resume a penitential life. They ought never to lose the remembrance of the injury offered to God by sinning against him, and of the harm done to their neighbour by giving him scandal. This twofold prospect excited all the zeal of the inspired psalmist. And tell me, Christians, what can be more effectual and powerful to awaken and animate yours? If I had wrongfully taken from a man the property which he possessed,

and which belonged to him, I should condemn myself to make reparation for the damage he had sustained; if I had hurt his credit, or reputation, nothing could excuse me from making suitable satisfaction. I have committed a great offence against the majesty of my God; I ought, therefore, to do every thing in my power toward the re-establishing of his glory. I have drawn, by my bad example, my brother into that worst of evils, which is sin; I have made him lose the most precious of all precious things, which is the innocence of his soul, and the purity of his conscience. I ought by consequence to leave no stone unturned to get him out of the gulf into which I have plunged him, and to cure the spiritual wounds of his heart. But if my cares can be no longer of service to those I have led astray, they not being in a condition to profit by them, how great a motive at least have I to make compensation for their loss, by bringing others, as occasion offers, to God's service! Now the means of doing this are set down by the royal prophet, by showing us what he did himself, and what it is our duty to do: "I will teach the wicked thy ways, and the impious shall be converted to thee." Ps. l. It is not enough that I return to thee; I would fain bring sinners with me to thy service. I will teach them thy holy ways, and I will endeavour to gain them over, both by words and edifying life. I have not only, O my God, dishonoured you by my own transgressions, but by the transgressions of those whom my example hath drawn into, or confirmed in evil. I will not, therefore, be content to glorify your name myself, but will furthermore endeavour to glorify it by their instruction, their reformation, their conversion. For this purpose, I shall have, O Lord, precautions to take, opportunities to watch, obstacles to surmount. But notwithstanding all these difficulties, nothing shall cool the ardour of my pursuits, or depress my spirits, because I am convinced it is a just reparation I owe you as well for the glory I have robbed you of, as for the injury done to so many souls perverted by my means: "I will teach the wicked thy ways, and the impious shall be converted to thee."

Let this, Christians, be your principle. Then shall the tares, so far as you are concerned, be turned into good grain. The intercourse which you hold with sinners, by being of service to them, will be of advantage to yourselves. You will save your brethren and yourselves too. You will hoard up treasures of grace for this life, and merit the eternal bliss of the other.

SERMON XI.

ON ADVERSITY AND PROSPERITY.

For the Fourth Sunday after Epiphany; or the Twenty-fifth after Pentecost.

"*When he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him. And behold there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waters; but he was asleep. And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord save us; we perish. And he saith unto them: Why are ye so fearful, O ye of little faith!*" MATT. viii.

THIS, beloved Christians, is a natural emblem of what passes every day before our eyes. The Holy Ghost, it should seem, by sketching it out to us in the gospel, was desirous to represent to us one of the greatest and most mysterious instances of God's providence toward mankind, and to make it the subject of our instruction. The disciples of Jesus Christ, that is, the righteous and elect of God, live in the world, which we may consider as a tempestuous sea, in which they are embarked by the orders of Providence. The Almighty is with them, and never quits them. In all their ways he follows them, and upholds them; but in other respects, to judge by appearances, one would imagine that on a thousand occasions he keeps away from them, forgets them, abandons them, is in their regard, as it were, asleep. He suffers them to be surprised, to be tossed and beaten by violent storms, to be exposed to sharp and troublesome temptations, to be afflicted, and in some sort overpowered, by the miseries of this life. Now who could believe that a special Providence watched over their persons? or at least who would not think that this same Providence is buried, as it were, in a profound sleep, and knows nothing of their wants, particularly when we see that the ungodly prosper upon the earth, pass their days in a calm, hold the first places, abound with superfluities, and are possessed of every thing that is called fortune, or

human advantage? It was in contemplation of this division, so surprising, and so unconformable to our ideas, that David cried out, and said to God: "Arise, why sleepest thou, O Lord." Ps. xliii. And it is in the same spirit that we say ourselves, like the apostles, "Lord, save us, we perish." Where are you, O Lord? We perish, and you forsake us. Every kind of evil is heaped upon us, and you are insensible to our sufferings. But to this, Christians, no answer is made on the part of God, than that which Jesus Christ made to his disciples in their fright and consternation: "Why are ye so fearful, O ye of little faith?" Where is the faith and confidence which you ought to place in your God? What have you to fear, while I am with you? This, beloved hearers, is a mystery of Providence, which I am going to make the subject of the present discourse, and in the nature of which it is of the utmost importance that you be well instructed. It is not to sinners only that I am to speak, but to faithful souls, to the predestinate of the Lord, to those who make it their business to serve him, and who, notwithstanding, see all the scourges of heaven fall upon them, while those addicted to the pride of life, pass their days in pleasure and in joy. To encourage and comfort them upon this head, is what I propose.

The faith of Christians hath been disturbed in all ages, and their confidence in the divine goodness slackened, by seeing the wicked in prosperity and ease, while the righteous groaned under a heavy load of adversity and hardships. This partition, in appearance so unjust, hath been at all times, as I may call it, the stumbling-block upon which many fell descanting on the order of Providence. For, hence sinners have taken occasion to look down superciliously upon the righteous; hence the righteous have slackened their pace in the way of virtue; hence the most godly have been often tempted to admit doubts to the prejudice of their faith. Hearken to David: "As for me," says he, "my feet were almost moved, my steps had almost slipped." Ps. lxxii. I confess that my faith began to stagger; and on how strong and solid soever a basis my hope was fixed, I could perceive myself begin to sink and yield. The reason is, that an emotion of zeal and indignation arose in my heart, at the sight of sinners who taste the sweets and comforts of peace, who succeed in all their designs and undertakings, who have all conveniencies for themselves and their families, who experience no kind of want in life; "I was provoked at the foolish, when I

beheld the peace of the wicked. Ps. lxxii. Doth God know what passes in this world, and how can I believe that he hath an eye to it? Libertines and impious men are the most happy, the most honoured, and the most wealthy: "They are the ungodly who prosper in the world, and increase their riches." Ps. lxxii. Whence I almost conclude, (adds the same prophet,) that therefore it was to no purpose to preserve my heart in innocence, and my hands clear of all injustice: "And I said, I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands among the innocent." Ps. lxxii. Thus spoke the most holy king of God's people, and this is what the pagans were wont to reproach the faithful withal. What God do you serve? said these idolaters. Where is his justice and his goodness to you? He sees you poor and distressed, and he takes no heed of you. Is it because he wants either the power or the will? If it be inability, he is no God; neither is he a God, if it be insensibility. You flatter yourselves with the hope of immortality in another world; but what likelihood that a God whom you fancy so powerful and so good, as to raise you from the dead, would not afford you relief in this present life? Nevertheless, you forego all sorts of pleasure; you will not resort to our plays and spectacles; you suffer hunger and thirst; you undergo patiently the most rigorous torments. Whence it follows, that you enjoy neither the present life, nor that future imaginary one which you expect.

To this the fathers made various answers. Most of them denied the supposition, in order to prove the direct contrary. For they maintained that the righteous are never unhappy upon earth, and that the ungodly never taste true happiness. Know then, (says St. Augustin,) that God never suffers the wicked to be happy. Nevertheless, (says he,) they pass for such; but they are thought to be happy, because they who think them so, know not in what true happiness consists. We must not judge by a certain exterior. Some (says St. Ambrose) have all the appearance of joy in their hearts at the very time that their hearts are rent with a thousand anxieties. In my apprehension, they are very easy; but according to their own ideas, and in fact, they are miserable. Thus, I say, the father spoke on this topic. But, beloved Christians, I consider the case in a quite different light. Let us not deny that the ungodly and sinners are in possession of human joys, and let us allow that the righteous are as wretched in this world as world-

lings would have it. Taking this for granted, I maintain that we are greatly to blame, if we diffide in the divine Providence, which hath pre-ordained things to be; and to convince you of it, I advance two propositions, which include whatever is most solid respecting this subject, and which shall make the division of this discourse.

First, then, I say, that God doth nothing in all this that should, or that can slacken our faith.

Secondly: I go farther, and I say that the order of God's providence in all this hath in it wherewithal to confirm our faith.

I shall endeavour to throw what light is needful on both the one and the other. Neither must you imagine, that I mean to entertain you with vain subtilties. I have proofs to produce equally plain, obvious, and affecting.

PART I. St. Augustin tells us, that the secrets of God ought to fill us with respect, ought to make us attentively revolve them in our minds, and, as far as the humility of the faith will allow, ought to make us inquire into the nature of them; but that they should never meet with opposition in our minds, and that it is not our province to pass judgment on them, or to contradict them. This, beloved hearers, is a very Christian, and most important maxim: for, one of the greatest irregularities of our mind is, to rise in opposition to anything that seems contradictory to our own notion of things; and from this principle it is, that all the errors into which we fall, with regard to God, derive. Now mind the manner in which I use the holy doctor's maxim, in order to make good my first proposition, on so unequal a division of good and evil in this life, whereby the righteous are oppressed with hardships, while the wicked prosper. In this I maintain there is nothing that ought to disturb our faith. And, in reality, though I were not able to discover the reason of God's will, in this respect; though it were an abyss in which I saw nothing, but in which my reasoning faculty was lost, it ought to have no ill effect upon my faith; and all I should have to do would be, to cry out with St. Paul, "O the depth!" and own it is a secret of God's providence, which I am bound to adore, but not allowed to fathom. Thus, although I am unable to conceive the august and incomprehensible mystery of one God in three persons, I do not upon that account suppose I have a right to call it in question, or am allowed to conclude that this supreme Being is above the reach of all

human understanding; neither am I for that the less attached to my belief. And why should not I do the same with regard to the point in question? When the point is concerning the providence of God, and his secret disposition in the government of the world, why should I doubt, or make myself uneasy, because it is beyond my comprehension?

I have a thousand proofs to convince me that there is a Providence in the universe, and that whatever happens upon earth, is by the divine appointment. I need no more than to open my eyes; I need no more than to view the firmament; I need no more than to contemplate all the works of the creation: there is not one of them that doth not bear testimony to this truth, and that is not a sufficient demonstration for me. The pagans and the barbarians have acknowledged it; and I should be more an infidel than the infidels themselves, if I refused to pay submission to it. Nevertheless, against all these positive testimonies, a difficulty arises in my mind. If there be a Providence, (say I to myself,) how can it suffer the righteous to be oppressed, and the wicked to be exalted? This makes me uneasy. Now I ask you, Christians, is it reasonable or just, that for this one difficulty, I should depart from a principle of faith so infallible, and so solidly established, as is that of a Providence? And because in the conduct of this Providence there is one point which seems obscure, I should look upon it as doubtful, and even dare absolutely to reject it? Is it not more reasonable, that I should oppose to this difficulty, which embarrasses me, all the maxims of my faith, and all the light of my reason; and that, not having sufficient ability to found the depth of the mystery of this Providence, seemingly so rigorous with regard to the righteous, and so liberal with regard to sinners, I should be content to come one day to the knowledge of it in its origin, that is, in God himself?

And this was also the royal prophet's way of reasoning, after confessing, in the presence of God, that he understood nothing of this procedure, and that a treatment so little conformable to the merits of the righteous, and the wickedness of sinners, surpassed all his knowledge, and confused his ideas. I am full of hopes, (says he,) O Lord, that in this you will discover to me the regular process of your judgments, and that you will show me, as in a mirror, the secret reasons which induced you to dispose things in this manner. Then shall I clearly see why you suffered that righteous

man to be aggrieved and persecuted, and why innocence and virtue were overborne and trod upon by the credit of the wicked; why this man of worth had no success in his undertakings, and why that worldly man, without faith or conscience, succeeded in every design he formed; why this pious and virtuous woman passed her days in bitterness of soul, and afflicting disquietudes, and why this other, addicted to the world, and abandoned to her passions, led a comfortable life, in the lap of ease, and surrounded with pleasures. You will discover to us, O my God, the latent springs of all this, and by one clear ray of light with which you will illuminate our minds, you will dispel the doubts with which our understandings are now clouded, against our will, in all that regards your adorable Providence. I fancied to myself, that by dint of reflection and consideration, I should be able, in this life, to clear up these difficulties, and dive into the impenetrable counsels of your wisdom; but I was much mistaken, and easily perceived that I lost my labour in unprofitable researches. Whence I concluded that I must wait "until I enter into the sanctuary of God, and have understanding in their last things." Ps. lxxii. In this manner, that holy king reasoned, and it was the Spirit of God which inspired his mind with that sentiment.

But in this respect, Christians, we are not reduced solely to the submission and obedience required by faith. Concerning this mystery, we have wherewithal to satisfy reason, as much as any other mystery, and perhaps more; and upon that account we are utterly inexcusable, when we give ourselves uneasiness, and indulge despondency, because we see every day the righteous afflicted, and sinners wallow in all the conveniencies and comforts of life. For we ourselves can find good reasons to vindicate perfectly the ways of God, and to be persuaded, that by acting in this manner, he hath acted wisely. Now, if with an understanding full of error and darkness, I see that it is reasonable, ought I not to be convinced, that Almighty God hath a thousand reasons infinitely more solid and elevated, which I do not see? And ought not these reasons, which I do not see, but which I may guess at from my own, to calm my soul, and give life and spirit to my drooping thoughts? All, therefore, that remains for me is, to follow the advice of St. Augustin, and to endeavour, not to know thoroughly, but only to have a glimpse of, the secrets of God, to the end, that so much as I may perceive of them, may teach me to judge of what escapes

my sight, and that both the one and the other may confirm my resolution, and add strength to my confidence.

But what do I perceive of these secrets of God, and what reasons can I give for a distribution that seems to clash with reason? In answer to your query, beloved Christians, and without circumlocution, or a long discussion, I shall give you such as occurs to me. That God would try his chosen servants, and give them an opportunity of showing their faithfulness by their confidence. That God (according to the comparison of David) would purify them by the fire of tribulation, as gold is purified in the crucible. That God would secure their salvation, and screen them from the inevitable danger which is ever connected with worldly prosperity. That God, (says St. Bernard,) by an amiable violence, would force them, in some measure, to unite themselves with him, by mixing bitterness with everything else, and placing before them no object that is not creative of disgust. That God would continually administer to them a cause of conflict, to the end it might be, at the same time, a continual cause of victory for them, and consequently of merit. That righteous as they are, they still are indebted to Almighty God on sundry accounts; whereas, the just man, (as Solomon speaks) falls seven times a day; but that Almighty God had rather punish them as a father, not as a judge; and accordingly that he chastises them in this world, according to his mercy, that he may not punish them in the next, according to his justice.

Should we stop here, Christians, and proceed no farther into the designs of God, what more were requisite to uphold the faith of the righteous man? And were not one of these reasons sufficient to shield him, and strengthen him against the sharpest assaults? Let God, therefore, command according as he pleases, let him destroy and overturn, let him debase and humble, let him strike according to his all-perfect will, the righteous man will have nothing to give but benedictions; and should he but utter the least complaint, God might reproach him in the words of our Saviour to St. Peter, "Man of little faith, why didst thou doubt?" Infatuated man! leave the whole to God; he loves you, and knows what is wanting to you. If he treats you with rigour, it is a seeming rigour; and how heavy soever you may feel the weight of his arm, it is the effect of his love.

Affecting thoughts, and powerful motives these of a truly Christian consolation! In so vast and numerous an audience as this, it

is hardly possible there should not be many of those souls whom Almighty God loves, and whom, notwithstanding, he leaves to the crosses and vexations of the world. Now my duty obliges me to give you a relish for these truths. My duty obliges me, beloved Christians, to raise by that means your sinking spirits, in a situation (into which either poverty, or humiliation, or ill usage may have thrown you) which overpowers you with sorrow, and which renders your existence so irksome and painful. My duty obliges me, as a gospel minister, to point out the means to you of finding the necessary relief in your faith. For my business is not merely to upbraid you with your transgressions, and to fill your minds with the salutary fear of eternal judgments. These things I have done occasionally; these I still do: nor can I thank heaven enough for the attention you give to my words, or rather to the words of God, which I utter. But on the other hand, my duty obliges me to comfort you in your troubles; and as I hold the place of Jesus Christ, who speaks to you by my mouth, and whose ambassador I am, "We are ambassadors for Christ," (1 Cor. v.;) my duty obliges me to say so you, what that divine Saviour said to the people: "Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are burthened and I will relieve you." Matt. xi. Come, ye melancholy and afflicted souls; ye who groan under the heavy weight of human woes, and in the agonies of grief. You meet with nothing in this world but contempt and scorn, and you daily experience its injustice. The most licentious and vicious rule and domineer over the most righteous; and this is what racks your hearts, and fills your souls with bitterness. But come, I say it again, and without changing your condition, I will relieve you. I am but a weak man, like yourselves, nay, weaker than yourselves; but with the grace of my God, with the unction of his word, and the maxims of his gospel, I have wherewithal to make you firm and unshaken amidst a thousand crosses, losses, and misfortunes; I have wherewithal to awaken all your faith, and wherewithal to animate all your hope; wherewithal to show you there is nothing desirable in whatever is most alluring in this world; and wherewithal to teach you the precious advantage of a state in which God watches over you with the greater care and love, as he seems less to love you and to regard your interest.

1st. For, to resume in order, and the better to lay open what I have not as yet but slightly touched upon, and what requires and

deserves your most serious reflection, as it must be a treasure and inexhaustible store of patience for you. I say, that if God treats the righteous man with a seeming severity, and suffers him to labour under a load of hardships, it is to try him. Thus he explains himself in a thousand places of the inspired writings, where he tells us expressly, that it is one of the laws of his providence, and that therefore it is, he lets his scourges fall more heavily on those who serve him, than on those who do not. Insomuch, that affliction, in the sacred text, is commonly called trial, or temptation; and according to the same language of scripture, what the divine Spirit denominates temptation, is nothing but affliction. This is the noble answer which one of the most zealous defenders of the Christian law (Minutius Felix) gave idolaters and infidels, when they reproached him with the extreme dereliction and want in which they saw the faithful; and they pretended to draw from thence, a consequence against either the power or the mercy of the God we adore. You are mistaken, (says he,) our God wants neither means nor goodness to relieve us. But he examines each of us in particular, by withholding from us the good things of this life, and keeping us in adversity. He searches our hearts, and interrogates them by sufferings and afflictions, as if he should say to the righteous man, "Declare yourself, and show me what you are. I have not known it as yet completely, and I mean to be told it by yourself. So long as you enjoyed felicity upon earth, and passed your days in a calm and peace, you told me, it is true, you would steadily and constantly persevere in my service; but at that time there was no relying on your asseverations. In affluence and prosperity, you could not well know, or judge with any degree of precision, to which you were devoted, to me or to yourself. But now, that cross accidents and misfortunes have disturbed the tranquillity of your life; now that you are oppressed with bodily infirmities, that you are fallen into distress, that you are surrounded, it should seem, with every kind of evil, it is a situation in which you may give me assurances of your faith, and in which I may rely upon your word. If, therefore, I see you persevere in my service, and always hear you at the foot of my altar, make the same protestations of an inviolable attachment, I shall hearken to you, and believe you; for a love evinced by such a test, can no longer be liable to suspicion."

To this, beloved hearers, what answer can we make? If God is not pleased to put the righteous man to the like trials, with what

kind of sentiment should his supposed happiness affect us? Is it with envy? Or is it not rather with a secret horror, for that if God spares him, it is because he judges him unworthy of his favour; because God gives himself, in some manner, no farther concern about fitting him for his service; because God considers him as a false metal, which the workman throws away, whereas, he throws gold into the furnace, and makes it pass through fire? It was that which gave occasion to the royal prophet's prayer to God: "Prove me, O Lord, and try me." Prove me, and grant me the consolation and inestimable advantage, of having it in my power to show you what I am, and which are the true and real dispositions of my heart towards you. But because I cannot better make them known to you, than by suffering hardships, strike, burn, destroy me, if requisite, with pains, afflictions, and wretchedness; I agree to all.

2ndly. We ought, ourselves, my brethren, to consent to it with the greater facility, because another design of God upon the afflicted righteous is, to purify them from all earthly affections. And, indeed, if temporal prosperity were annexed to virtue, we should not serve God but with that view, and consequently we should not love God for his own sake. St. Augustin hath already made the same observation, and reasons upon it with his usual solidity and penetration. When you see (says he) libertines, and the enemies of God, overflow with riches and enjoy vast estates, it makes a deep impression on your mind, and you say: "Through a course of so many revolving years, I have served my God, I have kept his commandments, and I have acquitted myself of all the duties of religion. My fate, however, is always the same; my affairs prosper not a whit the better for it, and it would seem, on the contrary, as if God were determined to perplex and cross them on all occasions. These people lead a criminal life, without any regularity, without any modesty, without any piety, and nevertheless enjoy perfect health, heap riches upon riches, and are honoured and distinguished." But (continues the same holy doctor) that, therefore, was what you wanted; it was, therefore, for health of body, for the good things of this life, for worldly honours, that your meant to please God. Now this is exactly the reason why it was proper that God should deprive you of them, to the end you might love him, not for the things he gives to men, but for what he intrinsically is himself. For, let it be remembered, (adds the same father,)

that if you are righteous, you live in the state and order of grace. As, therefore, this grace is entirely gratuitous on the part of God, it lays an obligation on you of loving God with a gratuitous love; neither are you allowed to love him for any reward but himself, as he means to be himself your whole reward. The good things of this world would make your love mercenary; and if you complain when God refuses them, or deprives you of them, you thereby discover, that these things are more dear to you than God himself, and, consequently, that you do not deserve to possess them.

3rdly. A great fortune is so infectious, that its inherent qualities are capable to pervert the most righteous, and that oftentimes it plunges them into a frightful gulf, and total corruption. The instances we have of this are but too glaring and too numerous. But Almighty God, by a signal mark of his providence and mercy respecting his chastisements, secures them from this so imminent a danger, by involuntary poverty, that is a preservative for them against the contagion of temporal riches; by a mortifying obscurity, that is a guard for them against the contagion of perishable grandeur; by a lingering illness, that is a fence for them against the contagion of sensual pleasures, and the deceitful suggestions of the flesh. True it is, that the righteous man may not now perceive the danger to which he was so much exposed, if Almighty God had not used such precaution in his favour. But what he is unable to perceive at present, he will perceive at the final close of ages, and at the great day of universal revelation. Then shall the Almighty place before his eyes all the injustices into which an insatiable avarice would have led him; all the criminal schemes and projects, in which an unbounded and restless ambition would have engaged him; all the excesses and ill habits, into which a blind and brutal passion would have plunged him, if the bridle of affliction had not restrained him, and the misfortunes of life had not hindered the fire from kindling in his heart. Enlightened with a ray of divine light, and convinced of the salutary and favourable secrets of the eternal wisdom which conducted him, he will bless God over and over again, for the very thing which oftentimes had well nigh excited his murmurs against God. What the world looked upon as a total dereliction, and kind of reprobation, he will consider as a stroke of divine Providence, and as one of the most precious graces of God.

4thly. Forasmuch, however, as it is not enough to withdraw

from the world, and the occasion of sin, if it be not in the view of adhering to God, I proceed farther; and gradually disclosing the favours of the Lord, and the designs of his providence, so far as I am able to discover them, I add, that he doth not make his elect suffer in this world, but to draw them to himself, and to lay them under the happy necessity of having recourse to himself, of confiding in him, and of fixing on no object but himself. For, (according to St. Bernard,) there are four classes of the predestinate. Some there are, who bear away the kingdom of heaven by violence; and these are the voluntary poor, who by a spontaneous act of abdication give up, and renounce, all property. Others endeavour, as it were by making a bargain, to purchase it; and these are the rich, who according to holy writ, procure by alms-deeds intercessors with God, and friends to receive them into the eternal tabernacles. Others, as I may say, seem as if they would steal it; and who are they? The humble of heart, who shun the light, not out of worldly consideration, but a holy desire of debasement, and who, in a retired and solitary life, hide from the eyes of mankind all the meritorious works they do. Finally, there are many who come not to the possession of it, but because it is out of their power to avoid it; and these are they who do not determine to seek God, but because God would afford them nothing beside whereon to place their affection. Had the world looked on them with the same eye it beholds its votaries; that is, had the world pleased them, made them happy by its distinctions, its respect, and its pleasures, ah! Lord, would they ever have thought of you? Like that selfish and carnal people, whom you brought up with so much care, and whom you made to feed upon the fat of the land, they would have lost the memory of their Creator and benefactor; they no longer would have remembered that you were their God, and all their incense would have arisen before altars not dedicated to you: "grown thick, waxed fat, much-spread, they would have forsaken the God their Maker." Deut. xxxii. But because your arm fell heavy upon them, and for their sakes you filled the world with thorns that pricked them, with losses and misfortunes that made them disappear, and suffered them no more to quit their retreats, though you seemed to make them die, you gave them life, and by undoing them to appearance, you effectually saved them. They found no other resource but you, and for that reason they betook themselves to you. They flung themselves into your

arms as their sanctuary, and there you received them, there you kept them, and there you preserved them from all danger: "When he slew them, they returned and came early to him." Ps. lxxvii.

5thly. Not but that they have many conflicts to undergo, and this is what God himself declares. The reason is, (as St. Ambrose observes,) that their merit is owing to their conflicts. Without fighting there is no victory to be obtained, and without victory there is no crown to be hoped for. You are surprised (continues this holy father) that God tries the patience of his faithful servants in this manner, and, on the contrary, leaves the greatest sinners in profound peace. You would know the reason of this difference. It is essential, and very natural: namely, that God crowns none but conquerors, and that he desires to crown his elect. Whence it follows by a necessary consequence, that therefore he must afford them a subject of triumph. But the crown not being reserved for sinners, he leaves them, by a contrary method of proceeding, without the means of fighting or overcoming. In this we have a similitude before our eyes; the sovereigns of this world act in a manner conformable to the sovereign Lord of all things, nor doth it surprise us. We do not suppose that they forsake those whom they intend to place in honourable stations, when the better to qualify them for the intended favours, they employ them in so many perplexing affairs, or expose them to so many dangerous occurrences. In the opinion of the world, it is neither indifference nor rigour, but grace and favour.

6thly. But even supposing that in this instance God acted rigorously towards the righteous, would it not be a paternal and merciful rigour? These are my notions of the matter. There is no man of worth, how righteous soever, that hath not lapses to repair, and transgressions to atone for. The most innocent and godly, according to the notions we should have of this matter, in the present life, is not he who never hath committed sin, (where is there such a man to be found?) but he who hath committed sin the least, and who the least commits sin; he who hath committed the slightest sins, and who still commits the fewest sins; he who recovers, and recovers the most speedily from his sin. Whoever he be, he is accountable to God for many debts, and from paying which nothing can excuse him. But when will he pay them? If it be after death, what a judgment and what a chastisement must he undergo? It is, therefore, better for him, that in this life, and

by the pains of this life. Now this, in fact, is the time which God chooses; these are the means he employs to chastise him. It was in this manner that St. Jerom wrote to the illustrious Paula, and thus he comforted her on the loss she suffered, and assuaged the heartfelt grief it occasioned. Why so many tears, (says he,) and such regret? Choose which you please, for your consolation, and adhere to one of these reflections. Either from the testimony of a good conscience, and without hurting or diminishing the real sentiments of humility, you consider yourselves as righteous, and then your comfort should be, that God perfectionates your virtue, that he exercises it, and gives it increase and strength; or the remembrance of your transgressions, and the knowledge of your weaknesses, induce you to look upon yourself as criminal, and in that view you should, in order to mitigate your grief, and render it not only supportable, but amiable, think that God corrects you, and affords you an opportunity of making him satisfaction at a small expense. But why doth he not likewise correct the libertine? Ah! beloved hearer, it is sufficient for you, that your God loves you. Why should you oblige him to disclose his reasons for the terrible judgments he suffers others to undergo? I have told it already; neither can I repeat it too often. God takes vengeance the more rigorously, the longer he postpones it; and wo be to the rich, the powerful, the haughty and proud ones of this world, whom, (to use a particular expression of Tertullian,) he pampers like victims for the day of his wrath.

Here let us stop; and by the way of conclusion to this part, let us reason, if you please, a moment together. By what I have said, the divine Providence is justified, respecting the partition which it makes of temporal prosperities and adversities between the righteous and sinners. For, this vindication must be reduced to two heads: one, that God takes care of his elect in this life; the other, that even in this life, he is averse from sinners, and suffers his justice to act against them. Now what but the cares of a mercy equally wise and beneficent, could thus induce him to try his elect, banish his elect, preserve his elect, unite them with himself by a stricter tie, make them multiply and accumulate meritorious deeds, in the view of making them rise to a high degree of glory. But by a rule directly contrary, is it not an effort of severe justice, the more to be dreaded, as it is the less discernible, to give up sinners to them-

selves and to their passions; not to disturb a mortal repose, in which they quietly remain absorbed; never to intermingle bitterness with the false sweets that corrupt them; to let them remain in an elevated state that swells their pride, in a splendor that dazzles them, in an affluence that inspires their minds with effeminacy, in a voluptuous life that brings with it irregularities of every kind, in a forgetfulness of a salvation and a state of impenitence that leads to a death of sin and reprobation? What deceives us is, that we oftentimes form our judgment of things according to the time in which we now are, and which passes away; but that the judgment of God is formed relatively to eternity, in which we shall hereafter be, and which will never pass away. Now, of these two rules, which is the best, and the most advantageous? According to the former, (says St. Augustin,) I grant that the sinner, it should seem, hath a right to insult the righteous man, and ask him, "Where is thy God?" But according to the latter, which beyond all dispute is the safest, and indeed the only one we have to follow, the righteous man may reply to the insults of the sinner: neither my time nor yours is as yet come; but let us have patience, they will both come, and then I shall ask you: where now are those gods whom you adored, and in whom you placed your whole confidence? What is become of all the happiness which you relished to fascination, and which you loved to adoration? Why do you not summon it, and make it relieve you in the eternal wretchedness into which you are fallen? "Where are their gods, in which they placed their confidence?" Deut. xxxii.

Accordingly, beloved hearers, what remains for you to do is, to enter into the views of your God who afflicts you, and by your patience to further his designs. And perhaps nothing ought at present to give you greater concern, than not to have as yet turned the talent to advantage, which you might have made to fructify a hundred-fold; than to have hearkened too much to your natural diffidence, and broke out into complaints so unjust and injurious to the providence of the Master who watches over you; than to have lent too fond an ear to the seducing discourses of the world, concerning your distresses, and the seeming unhappiness of your condition; than to have sought to excite the compassion of men for the sake of vain comfort, when you ought to have rather looked upon yourself as an object of envy, and expected relief from faith alone; than not to have sufficiently comprehended the truth of

these great evangelical maxims, that blessed are the poor, because theirs is the kingdom of heaven; and that blessed are they who suffer persecution in this world, and who mourn, because they shall be eternally comforted in the other. But, Lord, I now know enough to dispel all my doubts, and calm all the inquietudes of my mind. Of so many reasons, one only should suffice; and although there were not so many reasons, were it not enough to know, that whatever befals me, it is your holy will it should be so? Command, my God, whatever you please, and dispose of me as you please. What though the ungodly rule over the righteous, trample them under foot, and I, most of all, smart under the lash of persecution, I will cry out like the apostles in dismay, "Lord, save us, we perish." But resting entirely on your infinite wisdom and supreme mercy, I will say to you with one of your most faithful prophets, "In thee, O Lord, have I hoped, I shall not be confounded for ever;" (Ps. xxx.;) for I am certain that all will be well with me, so long as I place my trust in you; and that in the economy of your divine providence, which seems so surprising to mankind, there is not only nothing that should slacken their faith, but that should not conform it. This I shall make appear in the second part.

Part II. If there be a motive, beloved Christians, to confirm me in the faith, and to corroborate my hope, it is, that I see the impious rise and prosper in the world, while the righteous are overwhelmed in the mighty gulf of debasement and misery. This proposition may seem paradoxical at first view; but I am going to examine it, and to make the truth of it incontestably appear. We shall find it is founded on the most solid principles, nay, the most evident, of natural reason, experience, and religion. Mind this, I beseech you: for I am bold enough to affirm, that it is the essential point on which all Christian morality depends. In truth, to see the calamities of the righteous upon earth, and the prosperity of sinners, (which to us seems irregular,) is one of the strongest and most obvious arguments, to convince us—that there is another life besides this, and that our souls die not with the body; that there is a reward, a glory, a salvation, to be hoped for hereafter; that all our pretensions are not limited to the present life; and that Almighty God reserves for us something better and greater. This is what is taught us by reason; I say more: it shows us that Jesus Christ, our head, in whom we put our trust, is faithful to

his word, that his predictions are true, that he hath not deceived us, and that we may safely rely on his promises, inasmuch as they are already accomplished. This is what is taught us by experience: finally, it is evident, because nothing is more conformable to the sacred order which God hath established in the predestination of men, than the sufferings of the righteous, and the temporal advantages and prosperity of sinners: this is what is taught us by religion. Now I ask you, if these are not three very powerful considerations toward the supporting of our confidence? I know there is a future life to which I am called; a life of blessedness which is prepared for me, and this my reason dictates to me. I know that whatever the Son of God hath foretold will happen; whether to the righteous or to sinners, will come to pass: I may, therefore, depend upon whatever he hath promised me, and the proof I have of it is from my own experience. I know, and perceive, that whatever God hath regulated and ordained as to our predestination, begins to be fulfilled. When these three things are made to appear to us, can any one's faith to be so weak and wavering as not to be strengthened, roused, and inspirited? Now this, I repeat it again, is what evidently follows from the state of pains and afflictions in which we see the righteous, while we see the sinners live in ease, opulence, and pleasure. Let us recapitulate, and place in a clearer point of view, these three reflections:

1st. There is no libertine, whether in morals or belief, who would not quit his evil courses, were he but persuaded that there is another life. His libertinism is owing to his not believing, or not believing but by halves, that there is something real and true in all that is told about a future life, to which we aspire as to the term of our career, and the final object of our hope. Whatever he may think of it, (for it is not to him I now address myself, neither is it on his account I speak)—I, for my part, who believe in God, the Creator of the universe, to encourage myself, and always maintain a lively faith and firm confidence in my heart, make use of this strange diversity of conditions, in which I behold the good and the impious, in the following manner. I say within myself: virtue is generally oppressed in the world: vice holds an uncontrolled dominion and sway. The righteous are destitute of every thing, and miserable; the true friends of God are persecuted; the saints are despised, overlooked, and abandoned. What infe-

rence ought I to draw from this? That therefore there are more substantial blessings to be hoped for by the righteous after the present life, than the visible and perishable things that are now withheld from them. This is the inference which the fathers of the church always drew, and the grand proof which they always employed against those heretics who admitted indeed the existence of a God, but yet would question the immortality of our souls. Read what William of Paris hath written upon this subject; or, rather, hearken to the short abstract I am going to give of it.

You grant (says he) that there is a first Being; you acknowledge a God: but, answer me this: doth this same God love those who serve him, and who make it their only business to please him? If he loves them not, and hath not their real welfare at heart, what is become of his wisdom and goodness? If he doth love them, when doth he show it? Not in this life, because he suffers them to remain in affliction; not in the next, because you pretend there is no such thing. You may rack your imagination, (adds this holy bishop,) and torture your brain in search of subtilties, you never will be able to remove this difficulty, but by admitting the immortality of the soul, and confessing with me, that after death there is a state of life, in which the Almighty recompences every one according to his merits. For this God, as God, being necessarily perfect in all his attributes, must have a perfect justice. Now a perfect justice necessarily brings with it a perfect judgment. This perfect judgment is not fulfilled in the present world. By consequence it must be fulfilled in the next; and there is a world to come, which is that which we expect. Otherwise, (continues the same father,) the righteous might be said to be fools and madmen, and the ungodly, men of true wisdom. The reason is this: the ungodly, by seeking the good things of this life, would seek true happiness; whereas the righteous would undergo much, and pine away with toil and labour, in a fond expectation of an imaginary good. Thus, beloved Christians, this holy bishop drew an invincible argument to prove and establish the faith of an eternal life and glory.

The same is St. Augustin's way of discoursing, in his exposition of the ninety-first psalm, when, speaking of a Christian, disturbed at the dispositions which appear in the economy of the world, he alleges this same reason, in order to inspire him with courage against the worst events. Would you have (says he) all the lon-

ganimity of the saints, consider the eternal duration of God. Then the worst of accidents, far from casting a damp on your spirits, will be so many motives to a more constant faith and hope than ever. For when you are uneasy, because virtue is disregarded and spurned at upon earth, and vice is honoured, you do not reason upon a good principle, but are in an error. You consider but a small number of days which compose your life, as if in that small number of days the whole designs of God upon men were to be fulfilled. That is, you would wish, from this moment, to see all the righteous crowned and rewarded, and the wicked stricken with all the scourges of divine vengeance; and that God would not postpone his vengeance, but carry both into execution in the small number of your years. But this is a thing you should not ask. God will do both in good season, although neither in your time. Eternity is the time of God, and yours is the mortal life. Your time is short, but God's is infinite. Now nothing obliges God to do all things in your time: it is enough that he does them in his own. And therefore it is that I say, if you mean to corroborate your faith, and support your hope, you need but continually revolve in your mind the eternity of God. The reason is, that being witness to the seeming injustice with which he treats some, during their short abode npon earth, so rigorous to his friends, and so unfavourable to his enemies, you would draw this consequence, that therefore he prepares for the one and the other, an eternity in which he will render them all the justice due to them. All this is taken from St. Augustin; and I do no more than give you his words.

It was this same prospect into eternity, that made the saints of God invincible to every the most violent temptations. When did Job speak of a future and immortal life with most certainty and greatest faith? When, deprived of property, house, and family, he lay extended upon a dunghill; "I know," says he, "that my Redeemer liveth;" (Job xix.;) and that I shall live with him eternally. I KNOW it not only by an obscure revelation, but by a kind of evidence and demonstration. And whence did he learn it? From his very sufferings, and from all the calamities with which he was afflicted. When had holy David the clearest and most distinct conception of the eternal good things of the Lord, and discoursed upon them as though heaven were open before his eyes? "I believe to see the good things of the Lord in the land

of the living." Ps. xxix. When Saul persecuted him with greatest fury, I behold already (says he) the glory which God hath prepared for his elect, and it seems to appear to me in all its splendor. But, O holy prophet, how dost thou behold it? Thou art beset on all sides with afflictions and ills of every kind, and yet thou declarest to see, in the midst of all that, the good things of the Lord. But in that it was, (replies St. Chrysostom,) in the ills with which he was beset, that he found a certain pledge and surety, for the life to come, of possessing the good things of the Lord. For, his reason alone suggested to him, in the bottom of his soul, that as the ills which he had to suffer on the part of Saul, were against justice, the divine Providence must have preordained a future state, in which his innocence should be made manifest, and and his patience glorified. And this was his meaning, and the idea he meant to convey, when he said, "I believe to see the good things of the Lord in the land of the living."

2ndly. A stronger argument, beloved Christians, than any hitherto adduced, may be drawn from the predictions of Jesus Christ, which our own experience makes us see fulfilled in the sufferings of the righteous, and prosperity of sinners. This, too, is worthy of your reflection. If the Son of God had said in the gospel, that those who should follow him, and walk in his footsteps, should be exempt in this world from all pain, should be screened from all disgrace, should wallow in wealth, should pass their days in joy and pleasure, and that the portion of the ungodly should be vexation and crosses, our faith, I own, might in that case waver at the sight of the worthy man in indigence, humiliation, and sorrow, and of the libertine in the enjoyment of fortune, authority, and elevation. I should find it hard to resist the sentiments of diffidence, which would naturally rise in my heart, because I should imagine that Jesus Christ himself had imposed upon me, and should find, upon trial, the direct contrary to that which he had promised me. But when I consult the sacred oracles which flowed from the mouth of this saving God, and see them thoroughly and openly fulfilled by the secret dispensations of divine Providence; when I hear this adorable Saviour tell his disciples clearly and without equivocation, "The world shall rejoice, but ye shall be sorrowful;" (John xvi.;) when I hear him declare in the most express terms, that they shall be exposed to the persecutions of men, number up the crosses they shall be obliged to carry, and all the

ill treatment they must undergo, point out all the circumstances attending these matters, and conclude with admonishing them: "He hath said these things, that they may not be scandalized, but that when the time shall come, they may remember he mentioned them;" (John xvi.;) when all this, I say, is present to my mind, and done before my eyes; when I ruminate upon it, and examine into it, and have plain and obvious instances of it, is it possible that my confidence should not revive, acquire fresh strength, and considerably increase? If I were to see all sinners in wretchedness, and the righteous arrived to the height of human felicity, I should be struck with amazement, because I should not see the word of Jesus Christ fulfilled. But so long as persons of worth are in misery, and ungodly persons have all the advantages the world can afford, I shall fear nothing: I shall comfort myself, and bear up in the hope of what is to come; for thus I may reason: the same Son of God who tells the righteous, you shall be in affliction, tells them at the same time, that "their sadness shall be turned into joy." John xvi. The same who foretells them their sufferings and adversities, hath promised them his kingdom, and in his kingdom a perfect happiness. Now he is equally infallible in the one and in the other, his veracity being the same, when he announces good, and when he announces evil, inasmuch as he is himself the eternal Truth. As, therefore, the event hath justified, and doth justify every day, what he hath foretold concerning the afflictions of his chosen servants, the same may be said with respect to the everlasting glory of which he hath given them hopes. Accordingly, I enter into the spirit of the great apostle, and I say with him: I suffer, but it is without complaining, neither am I disheartened, or made uneasy, for I know in whom and in whose word I place my confidence. I know, and I am certain, not only that he can do for me whatever he hath promised to do, but that he will do it, forasmuch as he hath promised to do it for me, and for all those who care to prepare, in silence and submission, for the happy day in which he will come to acknowledge his elect and crown their affiance.

3rdly. This is not all, beloved hearers; I shall conclude with an article which seems to me, and should seem to you as well as to me, the most essential. For in this congregation I address myself to him, whom God knows to be of all the most righteous, but to whom, nevertheless, he hath afforded the fewest temporal

blessings. Let him hearken to what I say, and let him take my meaning. True it is, brother, and I know very well, that your case is hard in the eyes of men, your situation is melancholy, and your life wretched; but what conclusion ought you to draw from thence? That you bear the mark which the elect bear, which distinguishes them as elect; in a word, which Christ himself, their head and model, bore. Insomuch that you enter, by that means, in the order of your predestination, and that God begins to carry the decree which he hath made concerning it, into execution. But I shall place this mystery of salvation in a clearer light. You have been often told, in the words of the apostle, and it is a principle of our faith, that, our blessed Saviour being a pattern of the predestinate, to be glorified like him, we must bear a holy resemblance to him. For according to the excellent and sublime theology of the teacher of the Gentiles, it is the indispensable condition which God requires, in order that we share in the glory of his elect, and upon these terms it was that he chose them: "Whom he foreknew and predestinated to be made conformable to the image of his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ." Rom. viii. Now it is very evident, that our blessed Saviour lived upon earth in the same condition, to which Almighty God lets the righteous to be reduced; that he walked in the same path; that he was exposed to the same insults, the same contempt, and the same contradictions. How deep are the counsels of the divine wisdom! Tiberius wielded the imperial sceptre, and the Son of God obeyed his orders. Pilate was invested with the supreme authority, and the Son of God submitted to his sentence. Thus God worked, by the means of his only Son Jesus Christ, the salvation of men; and thus, beloved hearers, he works yours, by your own means. He impresses the characteristics of his Son upon you, and engraves on you his lineaments. Otherwise you would have great reason to fear; but now you have great reason to hope, as thereby are executed the favourable designs of God upon you, "Whom he foreknew and predestinated to be made conformable to the image of his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ."

If objection be made that we have seen, and do still see, men of worth in the world, rich, honoured, and distinguished, I grant it; but to this I have a three-fold answer to give. If there were no righteous, or elect, but the poor and the vulgar, that is, such as by the obscurity of their condition, or the distress of their affairs, are

in the lowest class, all other states would, therefore, be excluded from the kingdom of God; would, therefore, of themselves be reprobated states; would, therefore, be such as every one would be obliged to abandon or avoid. Now, notwithstanding this, it was the will of Providence to establish in society men of these states, and it is likewise the will of the same Providence to lend them protection. Whence it evidently follows, that God would not annex an inevitable damnation to these states; but that, on the contrary, he must make examples of holiness appear in them, to the end that those who are engaged in them, may not be cast into an absolute despair. I proceed further, and I add, that if ever the saints perceived themselves in the state of human prosperity, it made them tremble, it kept them in a continual diffidence in themselves, it was a humiliating thought for them, and it put them to confusion in the presence of God. The reason is this: as they were unable to perceive the image of their suffering Saviour in their prosperity, they were afraid that God had cast them off, and that they should never reign with their Saviour glorious and triumphant. What then did they do to make up the deficiency, and to acquire this so necessary a conformity? Mind this; it is my last answer. They did not, upon that account, relinquish their station, because they thought themselves called thereunto, and they would obey the appointment of Almighty God; but under the specious outside of an easy and commodious condition, they preserved the proper abnegation of a Christian, and bore on their bodies the mortification of Jesus Christ. Without renouncing their state, or a certain exterior peculiar to their state, they renounced the delights of it; and, above all, they renounced themselves. In the midst of abundance, they found means to feel the inconvenience of poverty. In the midst of honours, they could entertain sentiments, and exercise acts of profound humility. In the midst of worldly diversions, in which they sometimes seemed to bear a part, they did not forget the duties of penitence, which, on those occasions, they often practised in its full extent. All this they did, in the view of being numbered among those whom the apostle says "he foreknew and predestinated to be made conformable to the image of his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ."

It is urged that there have been, and that still there are sinners in the same adversity, and equally afflicted with the righteous. True; but without examining all the reasons why Almighty God

never will, nor does suffer vice to be always prosperous, I shall give an answer that will be an additional proof of the important verity I deliver. It is this; that for those sinners, who, like the righteous, are harrassed by the unfortunate accidents of life, one of the most precious and obvious tokens (according to the doctrine of all the fathers) of God's propitious regard toward them, is to be made to undergo hardships; that the greatest of all misfortunes for them would be, to be always cherished and happy, and never be contradicted in their evil doings; that the last means by which they may enter into the way of salvation, and be received into the bosom of eternal mercy is, that God chastises them in the present life; that by chastising them, he corrects them; that by correcting them, he reforms them; and that this renewal and reformation of manners imprints in them afresh the image of his Son, which had been effaced. And for that reason, we must ever recur to the words of the great teacher of the Gentiles: "Whom he foreknew and predestinated to be made conformable to the image of his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ."

And now, beloved hearers, may heaven grant that you may comprehend well the mystery of grace and sanctification which I have disclosed to you; and that in all the misfortunes which shall befal you, you acknowledge the benign hand of God! May the righteous man be not appalled, and may his virtue stand fixed and immoveable, on the solid basis of hope and patience. May the sinner, dazzled with the vain splendor that surrounds him, and inebriated with the false and fleeting happiness that deceives him, perceive at last the wrong notions he hath conceived of them; and may he henceforth wean his affections from them, and settle them on more deserving objects! But you, O God, make no change in the order of things which your holy providence hath disposed. Act according to your own views, not according to ours. Your views are infinite, and ours are limited; your views are pure, and ours are earthly; your views have no tendency but to our salvation, and ours have no tendency but to our perdition. If nature rebel, or if the senses murmur, grant not, O Lord, either to our precipitate and intractable nature, or to our blind and carnal senses, that which they desire. Deliver us not up to our perverse propensities, neither hearken to us, as you did in your anger to the Jewish people. But follow uninterruptedly your adorable designs, and, whatever it may cost us, carry them invariably into execution, both for your own glory, and our eternal welfare.

SERMON XII.

ON MATRIMONY.

For the Second Sunday after Epiphany.

"*There was a wedding in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there; and both Jesus and his disciples were invited to the wedding.*" JOHN ii.

HE was not only invited to the wedding, Christians, but assisted at it, and by assisting at it, he approved of it, honoured it, sanctified it, removed from it all its irregularities, and already took measures to consecrate it in the church, by the institution of a sacrament. It was not, therefore, undesignedly, and to no end, that he chose to be invited; for hence (say the ancient fathers) derives the holiness of matrimony: and if Jesus Christ be not invited to it, it is a profane state, as there is nothing to raise it, or give it dignity. But I say more, and I maintain it is not enough that Jesus Christ be invited to it by men, if they are not also invited to it by Jesus Christ. That is, beloved Christians, prayer must precede the grace of vocation, by which God sanctifies you, in order to your entering into the marriage state; and by prayer you must beg of God to take part in the holy alliance you are going to contract. A useless prayer, unaccompanied by this divine vocation. But if God calls you first, and then you call God, it is a perfect model and true idea of a Christian marriage. It is also the subject upon which I shall enlarge for your present instruction. And as I am aware that there are rocks unnumbered, against which the nature of the subject may drive me, it imports me to have immediate recourse to God: I address myself to him in the manner of the prophet, and beseech him to put a guard to my lips, and preserve my tongue from uttering so much as a single word, on which the malignity of the times might put an ill construction.

St. Augustin, speaking on the nuptial state, in an excellent tract composed on that subject, and collecting together in one point of

view the several advantages arising from it, reduces them to these three principal ones: to the education of children, which is its end; to conjugal fidelity, which is its tie; and to the quality of the sacrament, which is, as it were, its essential constituent in the law of grace. "A three-fold good accrues from matrimony—posterity, fidelity, a sacrament." These are his words, and they often occur in the works of that father: "And, indeed, it is a great happiness for mankind, that Almighty God, by the institution of a sacrament, hath established connexions and alliances among them; and that he hath raised these connexions and alliances to a supernatural order, by a grace which assists them to obtain these blessings. Besides which, it is an advantage greatly deserving of esteem, for a person engaged in the matrimonial state, to think that another person upon earth doth plight them their troth; and though nothing to them in the order of nature, or by proximity of blood, yet owes them everything, love, respect, mutual assistance, fidelity. Finally, I hold that God doth honour to fathers and mothers, by choosing them to bring up in the marriage state a lawful progeny, that is, servants, by whom he is glorified, and his church augmented." Here, then, we see the three invaluable prerogatives of matrimony; it is a sacrament, it is a mutual tie of society, and it is a lawful propagation of children for God. All this is true, beloved Christians; but do not imagine that these advantages are in such a manner gratuitous, as that they are attended with no charge or inconvenience. For this is the idea you ought to form of them, and which I wish you to comprehend, as they make the division of this discourse. Wherefore, from these three kinds of good result of necessity:

First, duties of conscience, and indispensable obligations to be fulfilled in matrimony.

Secondly, great difficulties, and very grievous to be undergone, in matrimony.

Thirdly, excessive dangers with respect to salvation, to be avoided in matrimony.

Now I maintain that you cannot satisfy these obligations, nor undergo these difficulties, nor escape these dangers, independently of the grace and vocation of God. Whence, I infer, that there is not a state among all mankind, in which this vocation of God is more necessary. This is the subject of your favourable attention, which I humbly crave.

PART I. It cannot be doubted, beloved Christians, that to con-

sider matrimony in its whole extent, and especially according to the qualities which I have pointed out: as a sacrament, as a mutual tie of society, and with respect to a proper education of children, which it lawfully propagates, this state carries with it obligations which it is of the utmost consequence for you to know thoroughly, and which, in order to satisfy the duty annexed to my ministry, I am going to explain to you.

1st. It is, without doubt, a great happiness for the Christian world, and for you in particular, who are called by Providence to live in the world, that the Son of God hath sanctified matrimony by its institution; that matrimony is not a criminal state, as certain heretics would have represented it; nor a civil partnership, as it is among the pagans; nor a simple ceremony of religion, as it was in the old law: but a sacrament which confers the grace of Jesus Christ, a sacrament instituted for the sanctification of souls, to represent one of the greatest mysteries, *the Word made flesh*, and to apply the merits thereof to such as worthily receive it. "This (says St. Paul) is a great sacrament;" (Ephes. v.;) and I mention it, my brethren, that you may know the advantages which our holy religion possesses in this above all others. For it is not great, but inasmuch as it bears a relation to Jesus Christ, our divine Saviour. It is not great, but for the faithful, who are the members of the mystical body of Jesus Christ; that is, it is only great for you. "I say unto you in Christ, and in the church." Ephes. v. All this is taught by faith. Whence we may infer, that there are many obligations, to which little attention are paid in the world, and which, nevertheless, are imposed by matrimony. For, since it is a sacrament in the law of grace, we are not, therefore, allowed to engage in it, but with a pure and holy attention: we are not, therefore, allowed to receive it, but with a conscience free from sin; we are not, therefore, allowed to use it, but in conformity to the views of God, and for an end worthy of God; and whoever is wanting in these duties, commits an offence nearly approaching to the nature of a sacrilege, by profaning a sacrament. Admitting the principles laid down by faith, there is nothing in all these consequences, but what is evident and incontestable.

But to these consequences little attention is paid in the world. And what is the reason of it? What is the reason that the rules of piety which Christians follow, and which they believe should be followed in the receiving other sacraments, are forgotten in this?

You are often the first and the most zealous in condemning a man, who should take to the church, and go into orders from interested views, or views of ambition. You would not approach the sacrament of our altars, without a previous purification in the waters of penance; and you would imagine it a high crime to present yourself at the tribunal of penance for any other end than to honour God, and be restored to his favour. When mention is made of Simon the sorcerer, who asked the apostles for confirmation, from the detestable motive of vain-glory; and when you are told that Judas appeared at the table of our Lord, and received communion in a criminal disposition, you abominate the wickedness of the one and the other. Now is not matrimony as holy and as venerable in quality of sacrament? Was it not instituted by the Saviour of the world himself, as well as the other sacraments? Doth it not contain mysteries as elevated as the other sacraments do? Is not whatever is said to the honour of other sacraments applicable to this in the same degree? And doth it not, by consequence, require proportionably as perfect dispositions, as Christian a motive, a purity of heart as entire, and a use of them as decorous and as holy?

All this we know in theory; but in practice people make a difference between this and other sacraments. For these they prepare; in these they seek God, and are influenced by religious motives and sentiments; and in this they act merely conformably to the laws of Christianity. But if the question relates to the sacrament of which I am speaking, you would say, it was in life an indifferent thing, and quite profane, that had nothing to do with God or religion. They make no conscience of contracting marriage upon merely human considerations. They celebrate it at the foot of the altar, in an actual state of sin; and although it be incontestably a sacrilegious profanation, scarce do they scruple it, for that most of them know little or nothing of this point of conscience. Now, beloved hearers, can they plead their justification, upon this head, before Almighty God? For if you would have me declare to you candidly, what I think of the matter—it is one of the most material irregularities, this day, in the Christian world. They seem no longer to consider wedlock as a sacred thing, but as a temporal affair, a mere negotiation. Who consults God, in the view of embracing this state? Who looks upon this state, as a state of holiness, to which he is called by Almighty God? Who chooses

this state for the sake of his eternal predestination and salvation? Shall I say it? The pagans themselves were more religious, wise, and reasonable in this respect. If matrimony was not a sacrament among them, neither was it, as it is become among us, a mercenary traffic, by which people give themselves to one another, influenced neither by a reasonable inclination, nor a real esteem, nor personal merit, but by revenues and inheritances, by gold and silver. Such is the knot which money ties, in almost all these alliances. And hence arises a very common, and not less deplorable inordination; namely, that after marriages contracted without attachment, criminal attachments are formed without marriage. Be that as it may, beloved Christians, what cannot sufficiently be lamented is, that although matrimony includes in its essence, two qualities, that of a contract, and that of a sacrament, they pay no regard but to the former, which is of an inferior order, and absolutely neglect the other, which is quite supernatural and divine. As a contract, it is managed according to all the rules of prudence. How many treaties, conferences, and meetings, articles and conditions, precautions and measures! But as a sacrament, it is concluded without reflection or preparation. They think that all consists in a few external ceremonies, practised by the church, of which they acquit themselves without recollection, or the spirit of religion. Now, is it possible, that a sacrament profaned in this manner, should draw down upon you those succours of grace which God hath annexed to it? And if these succours be withheld from you, how will you be able to fulfil the duties of your state?

2ndly. I say the obligations which matrimony imposes, considered not only as a sacrament, but as a bond of mutual fellowship. For here it is that the most powerful and abundant graces of God are necessary. I shall make it appear to you. The fellowship I speak of, is not only in appearance, but in affection; insomuch that you follow this precept of the apostle to the letter: "Husbands, love your wives;" (Ephes. v.;) and you, wives, those whom Providence hath given you for husbands. The rule you must follow is, to love one another, "even as Christ loved the church." Ephes. v. This, I say, is your model. Love one another with a respectful love, a faithful love, an officious and condescending love, a constant and durable love, a Christian love. All these are so many duties, included in that conjugal faith, which you mutually promised, and which united you. Be pleased to take notice: I say,

with a respectful love; because a familiarity without respect, leads insensibly, and almost infallibly, to contempt. I say, with a faithful love, so as to quit, for a husband or a wife, father and mother, as these are the express words of the law of God; and with still greater reason, so as to break every other tie that might captivate the heart, and so as to draw the affection from any other object that may seem to share it in any wise. I say, with an officious and condescending love, which obviates difficulties, compassionates weaknesses, inspires a conformity of mind and thought, and keeps up harmony between one and another's wills. I say, with a constant and durable love, to resist vexations and disagreeable humours, suspicions and jealousies, animosities and rancour. In fine, I say, with a Christian love; for here I may apply, and ought to make good the saying of St. Paul, that the Christian and virtuous woman is the sanctification of her husband. Such were those illustrious princesses who sanctified empires, by converting to God, and sanctifying princes, of whom they were, at one and the same time, the spouses and apostles. Such, ladies, ought you to be doing, that in your families, which they so gloriously, and with so much merit did in kingdoms. The best proof you can give your husbands of a true love, is, to wean them from vice, and bring them to the service and way of God; employing, for that purpose, all your thoughts, all your wishes, all your advices, all your cares, and encouraging yourselves to steadily persevere in this holy work, by that excellent saying of St. Jerom to Læta. She was the daughter of a man addicted to idolatry, but whom his wife at last induced, by vigilance and patience, to embrace the faith. "Now (says St. Jerom) it could not be otherwise; so great a zeal as that of your mother for her husband's salvation, could not have any other effect. And for my own part, (adds this holy doctor, in his usual lofty and figurative style,) I verily believe that if Jupiter himself, whom the pagans had adored, had lived in so holy a union and fellowship, he would have believed in Christ our Lord."

But, beloved hearers, the reverse of this, which cannot sufficiently be deplored, (and of which, perhaps, you know yourselves the pernicious consequences,) is extremely general in these times. You know it well; as it happens every day before your eyes. This fellowship, which ought to be the cement and honour of families, and their best support, and which husband and wife should mutually preserve as the best and most inestimable happiness of their

life, is eternally exposed to quarrels, aversions, separations, and sometimes scandalous reports; and all this, because neither he nor she will at all contribute to the keeping it up. The wife is headstrong, whimsical, vain, and a great lover of her own person. She is fond of plays, of living splendidly, of ornamental attire, of gay company, and of all the elegancies and diversions of life. The husband is imperious, jealous, fretful, morose and passionate; a man of pleasure, and immersed in debauchery. And because they are unwilling to thwart their inclinations in the least, she to moderate her stubbornness, to regulate her whims, to set bounds to her amusements, to her dissipation, to her vanity, to her attachment to the world; he, to bring down his haughtiness, to mitigate his fretfulness, to lay aside his unjust suspicions, and extravagant and ill-founded disquietudes; to moderate his anger, and to forego the infamous practice of debauchery; reciprocal complaints, murmurs, and reproaches unavoidably ensue. They conceive a disgust of one another; and not unfrequently, (to prevent disorders of a worse nature,) they find themselves reduced to the necessity of separating from one another. These divorces and separations are authorised, indeed, by human laws, but are not, upon that account, void of all guilt before God, and according to the laws of God. They are frequent in the world at this day; and we may look upon them as the disgrace of our age, especially among Christians. To these divorces and separations is owing the ruin of many families noted for property and popularity, in which the saying of our blessed Saviour is fulfilled to the letter: "That every kingdom divided in itself shall be laid waste." In this state, however, it is not uncommon to see persons, otherwise addicted to the works of godliness, live without scruple, not reflecting that the chief duty of real godliness is, in their regard, and so far as it depends on their care, to remain in a fellowship which God himself hath formed, or which ought, at least, to have been formed by God.

3rdly. And why did he form it? I have given the reason of it from St. Augustin; for a lawful propagation, and the education of children. This is the third and last ground, on which are raised the most important and essential obligations of wedlock. For, it is not enough to have given them birth, and brought them into the world; they must be nursed and taken care of. It is not enough to nurse them and take care of them, they must be provided for. It is not enough to provide for them in a worldly way, they

must be instructed and brought up in a Christian manner. To furnish them with a subsistence, and the support of a life which they received from you, is what nature dictates, and to which it were needless to suggest motives. To think of settling them in the world, is, besides the dictates of parental affection, what ambition oftentimes inspires you withal, and in prosecuting which, you are but too zealous, and too ardent. To labour for their perfection, by cultivating certain talents, which may distinguish and advance them in the world, is a care which you do not absolutely neglect, and of which some acquit themselves with proper assiduity. Not but that there are of those hard and unfeeling parents, who, taken up entirely with themselves, seem to have no knowledge of their children, and suffer them to want the most common necessaries, while nothing is refused to their own persons that may satisfy their worldliness and sensuality. Not but that there are to whom the sight of their children becomes so shamefully insupportable, that they keep them many years from their parental home, banish them in some sort from their presence, and abandon them to strangers for their education. Not but that there are who will part with nothing to settle their children in a manner suitable to their birth and family; but will suffer them quietly, and without pity, to drag on a miserable life at home, to an advanced age, and reduce them to the necessity of passing their days without rank, fortune, name, or profession. Not but that there are, who, from a total forgetfulness of their children, or through a weak and vicious condescension for them, neglect to educate them, even for the world, permitting them to follow their own ways, and giving them up, as one may say, to themselves, and to all their natural defects and propensities.

What a field, were I willing to expatiate on these, and on many other irregularities, which I pass over; because, after all, they are neither so important nor so frequent! But the most essential and most general is, to instruct children in the ways of the world, and not teach them the duties of a Christian; to attend to everything that concerns their fortune, and neglect whatever concerns their salvation; to inspire them with sentiments agreeable to the maxims and principles of the times, and not mind whether or not their sentiments agree with the maxims and principles of the gospel. To forgive them nothing, when the point is concerning a genteel air, a courteous demeanour, and a knowledge of the world, and be very

easy with regard to innocence of manners and practice of piety. For what, however, will parents be more responsible to God, than for the sanctification of their children? As that, undoubtedly, of all affairs, holds the first place; or, rather, as that is their only necessary affair, it is to that particularly they should have an eye in the instructions they give the children entrusted by Providence to their care. It is their province, therefore, to direct their children in the ways of God, and make them persevere in his fear and love; to correct the vicious inclinations of their children, and give them an early relish of virtue; to keep away, and preserve their children from whatever may corrupt their hearts—domestic irregularities, loose conversation, dangerous company, obscene plays, bad books; to procure for their children pious instructions, to give them useful advice themselves, but above all, to give them good example, being particularly careful to say or do nothing that may occasion scandal to souls so weak, and so susceptible of every impression. This would lead me too far; and, therefore, to cultivate the time allowed me, I shall enlarge no more upon this head.

To return then: such, beloved hearers, are the obligations of the marriage state. They are, I grant, attended with difficulties, nay, with great difficulties. But what did I mean to infer from thence? That no one should engage in this state, without a call from God. For, to fulfil all these obligations, the special assistance of heaven is requisite; and this assistance Almighty God grants to those only whom he calls: an assistance requisite, not only to fulfil the *obligations* of the marriage state, but to bear its *difficulties*, as I am going to set forth in the second part.

Part II. There are difficulties, beloved Christians, in the marriage state; and of this the proof is the more evident, because your experience of it is so frequent. To represent them to you, I need only follow the same ideas, by considering matrimony in the same light. And here be pleased (for the subject requires it) to renew your attention.

I have said, and I say it again, that matrimony is a sacrament; and that to this is owing its greatest excellence in the law of grace, but that to this likewise is owing its slavery. The reason of it is this same quality of sacrament that renders it indissoluble, and by consequence, that makes it a yoke, a subjection, a kind of slavery, by which a person gives up his liberty. If the Son of God had not raised matrimony to the dignity of a sacrament, it would have

been no more than a simple contract, more rigorous, indeed, than any other engagement whatever; but which, after all, might be broken in extreme necessity. Accordingly we find, that among those pagans, whose laws and jurisprudence were the most conformable to human reason, the dissolution of marriages was authorised and practised. They dissolved them, when important reasons induced them to do so; and they gave up alliances which they had contracted, so soon as they appeared prejudicial to them. Almighty God himself, in the old law, permitted the Jews to repudiate their wives; and although he granted them this privilege only in condescension to the hardness of their hearts, it was, notwithstanding, a lawful power, which they were allowed the liberty to use. But in the Christian church, that is, since Christ made marriage a sacrament, and communicated to it the virtue of a sacrament, it carries with it the characteristic of immutability. Acknowledged once valid, it always remains so. Although the conversion of life were at stake; although the destruction of kingdoms were threatened; although ruin hung over the universal church, and all the powers on earth were combined in arms against her, this marriage would subsist till death, which alone can put a period to it. This is the doctrine even of faith.

Now this, Christians, is what I call a slavery, and what is really such. For I ask you: Is not a state which brings you into subjection, without well knowing to whom you give yourself, in some measure a state of slavery? Now, all this is a consequence of matrimony. You are another's right; and this is what is most essential to it. Another's, I say, who had no property in you before, but to whom you now belong, as having acquired an inalienable right to your person. By the priesthood, I engaged myself to God only, and to myself; to God, my supreme Master, to whom I already belonged; and to myself, who have from nature a power to rule and govern myself. But this dominion which you had over yourself, you transfer by marriage to another person; and what is most difficult, and most heroical in religious profession, becomes the chief obligation of your state. Besides, I am not tied down by religious profession to any particular person; I am not always subject either to this person, or to that, but sometimes to one, and sometimes to another, which needs must greatly alleviate the yoke. Whereas, in matrimony, your engagement is perpetual. If the person pleases you, and is just such as your heart could wish, it is a great happi-

ness; but if the husband pleases not the wife, or if the wife doth not suit the husband, they are not the less tied together for that; and what a torment must be such a union!

I shall add, my brethren, another difference, but a very remarkable one, between both our conditions. It is this: previous to the engagement in a religious state, there is a noviciate, and a time of trial, which is not the case with respect to matrimony. Of all the conditions in life, (says St. Jerom,) matrimony is that which should most particularly be left to our choice, and of all conditions it is the least so. You enter into engagements, and you know not with whom; for you know not the sense, the temper, the disposition, the qualifications of the person with whom you join in so strict an alliance, till you have given your word, and it is too late to think of retracting. While this young man pays his addresses to you, he is all complaisance, all mildness, moderation, and virtue; but when the indissoluble knot is tied, you will soon discover what he is. You will see bluntness succeed to this affected mildness; violence to this supposed moderation; and debauchery to this hypocritical virtue. While this young woman remains unmarried, and her only wish is to give you her hand, she behaves with composure, and counterfeits her character; but when once she finds this circumspection and care to please you are not so necessary, you will soon be plagued with her whims, humours, stubbornness and haughtiness. Do what you please, take all precautions, use what care, diligence, and address you will, you must run some hazard in the marriage contract, which made Solomon say, that "a house and riches are given by parents, but a prudent wife is from the Lord." Prov. xix.

Consider, therefore, seriously my brethren, what such an engagement is, and such a servitude for all one's life, without redress. There is no vow, how solemn soever, with which the church may not dispense; but as to marriage, her hands are, as I may say, tied, her power not extending so far. An engagement which appeared to the apostles of such consequence, that they judged the state of celibacy preferable to it. "If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry." Matt. xix. And what reply did our Saviour make? Did he blame this sentiment so unfavourable to matrimony? He approved of it; he confirmed it; he congratulated with them upon their having comprehended what others were unable to comprehend: "All men cannot take this saying,"

Matt. xix. The reason of it is, that they plainly saw how heavy a burden it would prove for the greater part of those who should receive this sacrament.

In other respects, beloved Christians, my intent is not so much to give you a horror of it, as to let you see how greatly the divine assistance is necessary in the marriage state, and of what importance it is to beware of engaging in it against the will of God. Alas! how many have we seen, and do we see at this day, sinking and groaning under the galling yoke, or dragging it with difficulty, and lamentably complaining of their misfortune! How many wretches in the world are happy in appearance, but repine in secret silence at the slavery to which they are reduced! the more to be pitied, because they have scarce a right to our pity. For who loaded them with those shackles, with the weight of which they are borne down? Was it God, whom they neglected to consult? Was it not themselves? And with face can they bend the knee at the foot of the altar, and beg consolation of the Lord, by saying, hold me up, O Lord, or break my chain, or at least afford me your aid to carry it. What but this, or the like answer, could they expect? It was not I that tied the knot; my advice was not applied for; I am under no engagement to help you in your distress, or to ease your pain by applying remedies to your wounds.

2ndly. What enhances the trouble, and makes it more insupportable is, the companionship of which marriage is the bond. For although society, considered in itself, hath been always looked upon as a good, yet on account of the extreme difficulty there is to find minds mutually agreeable, and well assorted one to another, we may say, in general, that solitude is preferable to it. If we find it difficult to bear with ourselves, shall we find it easier to bear with another? I speak not of a thousand circumstances, arising from the necessity of having all in common in the marriage state. These are no other than the inconveniences of your condition, but yet so general, that even the marriages of kings and princes are not exempt from them. I shall confine myself to the diversity of tempers, which too frequently thwarts the happiness of man and wife. What contradictions and trials! What causes of mortification! What need of patience! A wise and sober husband with a volatile and unsteady wife; a regular and virtuous wife with a libertine and impious husband. Of so many marriages

which we see contracted every day, how many are cemented by a sympathy of hearts? And should there be an antipathy, what martyrdom can be more cruel? But this would not be so bad a case, if they would work thereby their sanctification; if they would carry their cross like good Christians, and of a sad necessity make a virtue and a merit. This, however, is the most deplorable circumstance of all, that these domestic trials and contradictions but serve to keep you the farther from God, and to make you the more criminal in his divine presence. Thus circumstanced, married persons seek comfort abroad; they turn their inclinations into another channel, and what irregularities doth not this draw after it? What animosities and aversions do they not harbour in their breasts? With what murmurs and complaints, in what distress, despair, and resentment, is a long succession of years run out? They remain in these dispositions till death; and (as St. Bernard said) all they do is, to go from one hell to another, from a hell of sin and wickedness to a hell of pains and punishments; from the hell of matrimony to the hell of the devils and the damned.

But these, you say, are extremes. True: and yet although they are extremes, there is nothing more common in the marriage state; nor can anything more plainly discover the weight of it, than that married people so frequently run into such extremes. If you had taken to this state by the appointment of God: if you had not chosen it of your own accord, or had not taken to it but by the call of God, according to the will and views of God, under the direction and protection of God, his grace would have made it supportable and easy, and his Providence would have watched over all your necessities. He would have brought you, like Rebecca, to the man that was appointed for you, and that was suitable to you. He would have given to your words a particular efficacy, and to your cares a particular blessing, to render this husband more gentle and compliant; to give him more steadiness and consistency; to withdraw him from his debauchery, to calm his disquietudes, to dissipate his jealousies. At least, in times of low spirits and disgust, of discouragement and contempt, of crosses and vexations, to which you are exposed, by supplying you with a supernatural and divine force, he would have enabled you to undergo them; and by his inward unction, (even when you were beset with external troubles,) he would have made you taste, in the bottom of your soul, the sweets and joys of a holy peace. But because you

blindly, and of your own head, put on, (as I may say,) your own fetters, he suffers you to feel the whole weight and inconvenience of them. That is, (and you know it but too well,) he suffers you to be plagued with all the oddities of a whimsical husband, all the haughtiness of an imperious husband, all the bluntness of a violent husband, all the stinginess of a covetous husband, all the dissipation of a prodigal husband, all the fastidiousness of an unaffectionate and indifferent husband, all the absurdities and preposterous notions of a jealous husband. He lets yourself take so wrong a turn, that instead of seeking, in Christian patience, and sage moderation, a remedy for the ills with which you are afflicted, you greatly increase them; that you become a vain woman, an indiscreet woman, a woman addicted to worldly pleasures and dissipation, an obstinate and head strong woman; that you yourself should have your vicissitudes and inconstancies, your vivacity and passion, your bitterness of soul, and haughtiness of mind; and that you and your husband accord in nothing, but in blowing and stirring up the fire of discord, and making your condition more and more wretched.

3rdly. This is not all: a third source of afflictions and sorrows in the marriage state, (and I may venture to call it an inexhaustible one,) is the education of children. "A wise son, (says Solomon,) maketh glad his father; but a foolish son is the grief of his mother." Prov. x. But, without in the least altering the words of the divine Spirit, I may add, in another sense, that the bringing up of children, whether regular or irregular in their conduct and behaviour, is generally for parents a cumbrous burden and a heavy cross. I speak not of the cares and attention which the earliest infancy requires, subject to a thousand weaknesses, to which you must condescend; to a thousand necessities which you must relieve; to a thousand accidents which you must guard against. Let us suppose them in a more advanced age, at a time of life when they begin properly to make themselves known, either by their good or bad qualifications. I will suppose, if you please, that they are well conditioned, and have all the appearance of doing well hereafter. But are you, upon that account, enabled to provide for their subsistence and advancement? Are you, upon that account, certain of not losing them in the bloom of their years? What a melancholy thing it is, for instance, to have a numerous family, and to want the means of providing for them! To have children capable of any business, and not be able to procure them employment. To

be under a necessity of letting them pass their days in a constrained idleness and obscurity, in which their birth, the credit of their family, and their personal merit, are buried and lost! What sorrow and regret, when an unforeseen accident, an unexpected death, snatches children away, all at once, on whom their parents doted and built their fondest hopes, proposing to transmit to them large estates and illustrious titles! It was expected that they would keep up their great families, which are now extinct, or on the point of becoming so. Now you know that these are not extraordinary events in the world, from which no consequence can be drawn; and you know what common experience teaches in this respect.

But what you know still better, because more common, is, how much unfortunate parents undergo in bringing up undutiful and untractable children; in maintaining children without talents or genius; in correcting the faults of perverse children; in prevailing upon ungrateful and unfeeling children; in bringing children abandoned to their passions, irregular and debauched children, prodigal and profuse children, back to their duty. And what is more common than to see families full of such children? Ungovernable children, who are always ready to fly in the face of those who expostulate with them, and give them wholesome advice and instructions. Ill disposed children, whose whole inclinations are to vice, and who are unsusceptible of any impressions of Christianity, or even honour. Unteachable children, whom their parents wish to educate properly, in order to procure their advancement in the world, but on whom, for want of capacity and disposition, all their care and attention are lost. Ungrateful children, who have no feeling of what is done for them, and who make no return for favours received, but by giving cause of sorrow and vexation, the more galling, because there was no reason to expect it. Unthinking children, whom a blind precipitancy is perpetually plunging into perplexities. Debauched children, whom passion hurries into irregularities that bring themselves into contempt, and reflect disgrace on such as are connected with them. Prodigal children, who borrow on all sides, and from all sorts of people, for extravagant purposes, not at all solicitous about future payment, or the consequence that must ensue.

But what occasion to enlarge any farther upon this head? What can I say which you have not yourselves from experience, a better knowledge of than I can pretend to? Is it not this, ye fathers

and mothers, that plants thorns under your pillows? Is it not this that whelms you into the depth of melancholy, or that drives you into frantic raptures of rage and despair? Is it not this that rives your hearts, and makes you say on so many occasions, what the mother of Jacob and Esau said: "If it was to be so, what need for me to conceive?" Gen. xxx. If these be the fruits of wedded love, had it not been better I had never thought of it? How happy the state, in which, free and disengaged from all worldly care, one hath nothing to mind but one's own person! This you say, beloved hearer, and not without reason. But what is still more certain, and what you should reproach yourself with in the presence of God, is, that therefore you ought not to have determined so speedily on a choice of which the consequence was so much to be apprehended; that you ought to have taken proper measures, by consulting Almighty God in prayer, and advising with his ministers, whom he hath appointed to be the interpreters of his will: that you ought to have weighed the matter thoroughly, not by the false maxims of the world, but by the precepts of the gospel; in short, that you ought to have done everything in your power, before you fixed your choice on wedlock, to be well informed of its obligations, of its difficulties, and in the last place, of its dangers, which I am going to make appear in the third part.

Part III. There is no condition exempt from danger, I mean danger respecting salvation. Not general ones only, but particular ones, and peculiar to each state. Solitude itself is not free from them; and the very anchorets were obliged to fight in defence of their innocence, and defend themselves against the attacks to which they were exposed. Neither have these succeeded on all occasions. And how often hath the church seen her most illustrious beacons extinguished, and wept the fall of those whom she proposed to place one day in the roll of saints! But, further; according to the opinion of the fathers and of Christian moralists, if every state be exposed to danger, we may safely say, that matrimony is one of the most dangerous. The proof of it is this: because in matrimony things must be reconciled, which are not easily reconcileable, which are seldom met with in conjunction, which in the common estimation of men seem incompatible, and yet without which it is impossible to be saved: for the point is, to reconcile conjugal liberty with continence and chastity; a true and intimate friendship for a creature, with an inviolable fidelity to the Creator;

an exact, diligent, watchful care of temporal affairs, with an external disengagement from the things of this world. On what is all this founded? On the same qualities of matrimony, which are the ground-work of this discourse.

Take notice, Christians. If anything enhances the crime of incontinence in the marriage state, before Almighty God, it is the dignity of the sacrament; and yet no state is more subject than that of marriage to the excesses of a passion without rule or measure. What is it that most forcibly impels a wife, and even obliges her to espouse with most zeal the interests of her husband, and use every possible means to please him? Is it not that strict union of fellowship which ought to subsist between the one and the other? But is it not this same zeal for a husband, this same attachment, that puts her in evident danger of abandoning, on a thousand occasions, the interests of God, and giving him displeasure? In fine, parents must be watchful and careful in regulating their families, which if they neglect, they do not fulfil the duty of their conscience, for that they are the guardians of their children, and having given them life, it is incumbent on them to provide for their maintenance and education. Now is not this care to inspect a family, to put children to business, to leave them a fortune sufficient to maintain them according to the rank in which they were born, the greatest and most dangerous of all temptations? Is it not the most specious and subtile pretext to authorize, in appearance, all the injustices which a greedy avarice is wont to suggest? And consequently, is it not a continually subsisting occasion of committing sin, and of being lost for ever? Let us proceed: and you, beloved hearers, whose state exposes you to so many dangers, at least open your eyes, and learn the means to preserve yourselves from them.

1st. The first danger is, the incontinence of matrimony. I restrict myself to that word; and it is with difficulty I utter even that. St. Jerom, writing to a virgin, and instructing her in the duties of celibacy, a state in which she professed to live, was not afraid to express his thoughts in certain terms that might hurt her delicacy. And he gave for reason, that he deemed it better to run the hazard of not speaking with sufficient reserve, than to hide truths from her which immediately concerned her eternal welfare. And perhaps he had reason so to deliver himself by letter. But in this evangelical pulpit, Christians, my duty obliges me, without disguising or varying the truth, to use the wise precaution, which the

dignity of my ministry requires. You know what the law of Christ commands, and what it forbids; or, if you do not, all I can say is, that it is of the utmost importance for you to know it thoroughly, because your salvation is at stake: that matrimony is a state of chastity and continence, as well as celibacy, whatever difference there may be between them in other respects; that there are laws in matrimony, ordained by God, which it is not allowable to transgress; that all the irregularities committed in matrimony, far from being excused, or in some shape justified by the sacrament, contract thereby a particular malignity and deformity; that you have a conscience, to which you must hearken in this affair, and which will judge you in the presence of God; in a word, that (as St. Jerom observes,) of the three kinds of chastity, to wit, virginity, widowhood, and matrimony, conjugal chastity, though the most imperfect, is yet the most difficult; because (continues this holy doctor) it is much more easy to abstain entirely, than behave moderately, and renounce absolutely to the flesh, your domestic enemy, than prescribe its laws, and repress its sallies. Virginity, (adds the same holy father,) by preserving itself, subdues almost without fighting. Scarce is it acquainted with the danger, because it keeps at a remote distance. We may say the same proportionably of widowhood. But the case is entirely different with respect to conjugal chastity. Between that and impurity, there is only a step; but a step that leads to a crime deserving of eternal wo.

2ndly. To this first danger is annexed another, mutual fellowship, of which the effect should be so perfect a union of hearts, that for your spouse you should be disposed to give up everything, to sacrifice everything, but with this exception so rare and delicate, that conjugal love do not supersede the love of God; that man and wife should be so affected one to another, that at the same time both the one and the other be still more strongly affected to God; that a wife, disposed to follow all the reasonable inclinations of her husband, have still fortitude enough to resist him, whenever he would have her fall in with his passions, bear a part in his irregularities, lend an ear to his defamatory or impious discourses, join in his resentments, or be aiding to his revenge. Accordingly, when your husband hath received an injury, when he hath been unjustly offended and outraged, it is allowable for you to be affected with his case, to partake in his afflictions, to procure him just and suitable satisfaction: this you may do, nay, this you are bound to do.

But to proceed farther; to adopt his animosities and aversions, to abet his frantic sallies and violence, to agree to everything which an imbittered and inflamed heart inspires, is not to behave like a Christian woman. That kind of fidelity is not the true one; and our blessed Saviour in instituting matrimony in his church, did not mean it would serve as an handle to make the crimes of another one's own. In like manner, should this husband, either from ambitious or interested views, form unjust designs, and use his endeavours to make you a sharer in his wicked undertakings, then is the time to act with resolution and a holy assurance, and to stand firm in opposition to his iniquity. But I am bound to obey him; no obedience is due to him in prejudice to the law of God. But he will not cohabit with me: his displeasure in that will be preferable to his esteem. But there will be no peace or tranquillity in the family: you will enjoy peace and tranquillity of conscience, and that is enough. But he will leave no stone unturned to give me uneasiness: it will give you an opportunity of exercising your patience, and God, moreover, will afford you comfort. But how is it possible to keep up perpetually that unshaken firmness, and to act always resolutely and consistently? That is not easy, I grant; and for that reason it was, that I proposed it as one of the greatest difficulties of your state.

And this is what St. Paul meant to teach the Corinthians, when he made the happiness of virgins to consist in not being divided between God and the work; and in not being charged with the obligation and care of pleasing men, but only Jesus Christ, the spouse of their souls: "And the unmarried woman and the virgin thinketh on the things of the Lord." 1 Cor. vii. Whereas, (adds he,) a married woman is always at a loss how to preserve, at the same time, the affection of her husband and the favour of God; being obliged to preserve, so far as she is able, both the one and the other, and yet not knowing, on a thousand occasions, how to reconcile both obligations. Insomuch, that she is under the afflicting necessity of giving up one, in order inviolably to adhere to the other. And this is what grieves her, what divides her heart, what fills her mind with contrary thoughts, wishes, and affections; what keeps her in continually racking propensities, and frequently in the most cruel uncertainties: "But she that is married thinketh on the things of the world, how she may please her husband." 1 Cor. vii. And here she is exposed to the greater danger, because, the presence of

her husband, with whom she lives, and the necessity of being upon good terms with him, make a deeper and more lasting impression on her. If, perchance, at certain times, when resolution is more strong, and grace more abundant, she hearkens to conscience, and persists in her duty, it is much to be feared that this conscience, in a continual struggle, will fail at last, and be overcome. Is it not thus that a weak complaisance hath been the destruction of so many wives, and brings such numbers of them every day to ruin? They were in heart and by inclination mild, patient, regular, upright; but an insatiable and avaricious husband, a choleric and revengeful husband, a sensual and voluptuous husband, hath induced them to become accomplices of his frauds, aversions, and lasciviousness.

3rdly. What shall I say, and what may not be said, of the last danger, which is always concomitant with the care of a family, and the education of children? It is certain, and I have already shown you sufficiently, that the education of children lays a strict obligation on you of attending to temporal affairs. But it is also certain, that this obligation is a rock against which it is no easy matter to avoid splitting. And who cannot see the extreme difficulty of reconciling together the care of property, and a disengagement from that same property? According to the gospel, if you neglect to provide for your children in a manner suitable to their condition, you incur guilt in the presence of God; and if again, in the view of providing for your children, you suffer your heart to be possessed with a desire and love of riches, you have no right to, or hopes of salvation. In the marriage state, you are not allowed, as others are, to relinquish everything, in order to follow Jesus Christ. You must possess, you must preserve, you must labour in a reasonable manner to acquire; but in possessing, preserving, and acquiring, you must wean your heart from all terrene affections. So speaks St. Paul. Hearken to his words: "This, therefore, I say, brethren; it remaineth that they who have wives, be as though they had none; and they who buy, as though they possessed not; and they who use this world, as though they used it not." 1 Cor. vii. The reason of it is given by the same apostle: "For, the figure of this world passeth away." 1 Cor. viii. And for my part, I am bold enough to add, applying to you this point of doctrine: because the attention which you may give, and which you ought to give, to the things of this world, takes off in no manner the obligation of renouncing them in heart and will. This, our blessed Saviour,

made a general law for all mankind; and as this law, St. Chrysostom tells us, cannot mean a real and effective renunciation, it must be understood, necessarily, of mental renunciation, "He that forsaketh not all." Luke xiv. That is, Christians, when the Saviour of the world pronounced this oracle, he spoke of you as well as of me, with this material difference, however, that when he laid this command on you, he laid a heavier weight on you than on me. For he would not have this inward disengagement from worldly things in the least diminish the vigilance necessary to preserve your fortune, and support your family. Now, to join together both the one and the other, is what I denominate the heroical virtue of your state. And how, you will say, is it possible to arrive at that pitch of evangelical poverty? To this, I answer, as our Saviour himself answered on a subject nearly parallel: It is impossible for men, but not for God. It is impossible for those who intrude themselves unadvisedly, and without the grace of God's call, into the matrimonial state; or who having this grace, use it not in the manner they ought to do. But for those who are faithful to it, everything is possible. Abraham lived in the same state that you do, had a family to mind and maintain as you have, and enjoyed a larger property than you do; and yet these perishable possessions never excited the least desire or covetousness in his heart.

Be that as it may, beloved hearers, you know the obligations attending wedlock; you know its difficulties, neither are you ignorant of its dangers: and, by consequence, you see how much it imports you to be instructed, conducted, and assisted in it by God: that is, how much it imports you not to engage in it, but with the approbation of God, and to draw down upon you in it the grace of God. But if it was not by the divine appointment that you have entered into the marriage state, is there no remedy, or what are you to do? You must do what the penitent sinner doth. He repairs, by the grace of penitence, what he lost by losing the grace of innocence. In like manner, you will repair, after the marriage contract, the evil you committed by cantracting marriage, not having the first graces of this state; by recurring to God you must obtain the second. For, God hath secondary graces to supply the deficiency of the first; and in these it is you must place your confidence. However, as they are not so frequent and abundant, when they have not been preceded by the others, what remains for you

to do is, to watch over yourself with more attention; to apply with more zeal to all the duties of a state in which it is now God's will that you persevere; to conceive a more lively and bitter repentance of the misdemeanor into which you have fallen through your own fault; to redouble your prayers, upon that account, and to cry out the more vehemently to the Lord. Ah! my God, (must you say with fervour, as the brother of Jacob said to Isaac, after having lost his right of primogeniture,) "Have you but one benediction, father?" Gen. xxvii. True it is, my Lord, I have deviated from the right path which you pointed out to me. But have you therefore rejected me? And doth your good Providence want means to repair the loss I have suffered? Cast, O my God, once more a favourable eye upon me. Do not abandon me to myself, for that I am determined henceforward to leave myself to be wholly governed by your divine will: "Give me, likewise, I beseech thee, thy benediction." Gen. xxvii. He will hearken to your vows, beloved hearer; and by a fresh exertion of his divine mercy, he will assume other views of predestination in your regard, and will direct you into the harbour of everlasting bliss.

SERMON XIII.

ON WORLDLY DIVERSIONS.

For the Third Sunday after Easter.

"*Verily, verily, I say unto you, that ye shall weep and lament, but the world will rejoice.*" JOHN xvi.

IT is Jesus Christ that speaks, beloved Christians; and that in a few words pronounces, in the gospel, two judgments directly contrary to each other: one, in favour of his chosen servants, represented in the apostles; the other, against sinners, who compose this world, a world which he hath so loudly reprobated, and against which he hath so often thundered out his curses. Ye shall weep and lament in sufferings and heart-corroding anxieties, is the portion of the predestinate; but to rejoice, and enjoy all the pleasures of life, is the portion of sinners. What a portion, after all, beloved

Christians! Could you ever have thought the case to be such? Are these the means by which the Son of God threatens to chastise the enemies of his gospel? Are these the rewards he promises those who shall faithfully and constantly tread in his footsteps? And according to our notions, ought he not, it should seem, to invert the proposition, and say to the righteous, "ye shall rejoice;" and to the wicked, "ye shall sink under a heavy load of vexations, and pass your days overwhelmed with sorrow?" This, beloved Christians, he should have done, according to the notions of mankind; that is, according to the weak and limited notions of carnal prudence. But the divine Wisdom hath views infinitely superior to those of men; and in order to fulfil the designs of men to the advantage of the elect, it was necessary they should give up the diversions of the world; because how good and pleasing soever an appearance they may wear, they end unhappily, and lead to perdition. Wherefore, observe, what our Saviour adds for the comfort of his disciples: "After having passed (says he) your days in tears, your grief shall be converted into joy," a solid, lasting, eternal joy; giving them, by an opposite rule, to understand, that the deceitful joys of the world would end in the utmost wretchedness. A great and terrible truth, which I mean this day to develope, and the importance of which will appear in the sequel of this discourse.

I mean not to exaggerate, beloved Christians; neither is it my design to condemn all diversions, without exception. I am aware of the decree which our blessed Saviour hath passed against those who enjoy the good things of this world, when he says: "Wo to you that laugh, to you who seek the pleasures of this life; wo to you, because ye have your consolation." Luke vi. You, who enjoy felicity, and make that felicity consist in the vain enjoyments of the earth. But without wresting the words of Jesus Christ to an unnatural sense, or giving them an interpretation in any wise too favourable, it is a justice I owe to truth, to acknowledge, that there are recreations innocent and becoming, and consequently permitted according to the rules prescribed by the gospel. It is not, therefore, my intention to assert, that all the diversions of the world are criminal, and reprobated by Almighty God. But yet I declare with St. Gregory, pope, who said it before me, that those diversions which in the world are permitted and innocent, are very rare; that those diversions which in the world are becoming and decent, are few in number; in a word, that the greatest part of those diver-

sions which have obtained in the world, are highly deserving of condemnation. This I ground upon three principles, in which is comprised the whole of my subject, and which is well worthy of your serious attention. These diversions of the world I shall consider in their *nature*, in their *extent*, and in their *effects*. Now I hold, as you shall see, that they are almost all of them—

Either impure and forbidden in their nature; and this is the first part:

Or excessive in their extent; and this is the second part:

Or, in fine, scandalous in their effects; and this is the third and last part.

Be attentive, I beseech you, to these three reflections, which require a more than common elucidation, and on which I shall endeavour to throw what light is needful.

Part I. Tertullian hath a very opposite observation in the treatise he composed of "Public Exhibitions." He says, that the ignorance of the mind of man is never more presumptuous, nor ever pretends to philosophize and reason with more precision, than when he is forbidden the use of some diversion or pleasure, of which he is in possession, and of which he thinks the possession lawful. For then he puts himself upon the defensive, becomes subtile and ingenious, strikes out by thinking a thousand pretexts to maintain his right; and, in the apprehension of being deprived of that which pleases, he at last persuades himself that what he desires is becoming and innocent, though at bottom criminal, and directly contrary to the law of God. And, indeed, it is to this is owing the daily and melancholy decay of morals among Christians. A thing is agreeable, or seems to be so; and because it is agreeable, we indulge a love of it; and because we love it, we imagine it good; and by dint of imagining, we work ourselves into a kind of conviction, in virtue of which we proceed to action, to the prejudice of conscience, and in opposition to the most pure lights of grace. Now, let us apply this general maxim to particular points, and to that especially which is the subject of this discussion.

I hold that there are diversions in the world, which pass for lawful, and which people of the world authorise as it were by common agreement, but which the Christian law condemns, and which are incompatible with integrity of life and purity of manners. Let us descend to particulars; for otherwise, Christians, you might be at a loss to see the force of my propositions, and perhaps, in prac-

tice, whatever I should say would produce no fruit. Wherefore, let us reason upon topics the most ordinary, and the best known; topics nearly the same as those which Tertullian hath handled with his usual energy. Hearken to this:

1st. I ask, for instance, whether or not those profane exhibitions, those spectacles, to which your idle and voluptuous worldlings resort; public meetings of mere pleasure, where all are admitted who come desirous to see and be seen; in a word, to preclude all ambiguity, whether or not plays and balls be forbidden diversions? Some, enlightened with the true light, the light of the gospel, disallow them: others, deceived by false lights, the lights of carnal prudence, vindicate them, or at least strain every nerve to vindicate them. Every one follows his own notions, and decides accordingly. For my own part, Christians, though such amusements were not forbidden me by my profession, and I had it in my option to do as I pleased, I verily think there would need no more, to make me renounce them, than this diversity and clashing of sentiments. For why (would I say) should I run the risk of wounding my conscience for so small a matter, the loss of which is attended with little or no inconvenience? On one hand, I am assured, that diversions of this kind are criminal; and on the other it is affirmed, that they are no way sinful. The result of which can be no other, than that the case is doubtful; and as they who maintain that innocence is lost by such diversions, are, without comparison, the most regular in their conduct, the most attached to their duty, the most knowing in the ways of God and godliness, is it not more secure, and more agreeable to the rules of prudence, to be guided by them, than so very lightly to put my eternal doom in jeopardy? Thus, I should conclude; and the conclusion, no doubt, would coincide with reason and good sense.

But I would not stop there; more weighty considerations should fix my resolution. What then would I do? Following the inspiration of the divine Spirit, I would consult those whom God in his wisdom hath given me for masters, the fathers of the church! "Ask thy father, and he will declare it to thee; thy forefathers, and they will tell it thee;" (Deut. xxxii;) and having taken their opinion, it were hard to conceive, that any nicety of conscience should hinder me from being absolutely convinced upon this head. For they would teach me truths capable not only to determine my judgment, but to inspire me with a horror of these diversions.

They would tell me that the pagans themselves proscribed them, as prejudicial and contagious. We need only peruse what St. Augustin hath remarked in his excellent work, "The City of God," and the admirable edicts he mentions to the shame of those who would patronise, among Christians, that which paganism had rejected. They would tell me, that in the primitive ages of the church, to abandon plays and balls was an undeniable mark of religion; and, in particular, that they censured the theatre, not only because in those times it helped to promote idolatry and superstition, but because it was a school of debauchery and lewdness. Now I leave you to judge, whether it be not the same thing at this day, and whether the fatal contagion of impurity be not the more to be dreaded and shunned, as it is the more disguised and refined. True it is, that the language of the stage is now more chaste, more studied and correct; but experience hath taught you, that this language neither tarnishes the mind, nor corrupts the heart the less for that; and that in all probability it were better hear the adulteries of Jupiter and other heathen gods, the stories of which, expressed openly and without reserve, would offend the ear, and not make so deep an impression on the soul. They would tell me, than in the general opinion of the faithful, no one could keep the oath and promise he made in baptism, so long as his heart remained attached to these frivolous pastimes. For, it is mocking God himself, my brother, (says St. Cyprian,) to have renounced the devil, by receiving, as you did, in the sacred laver of regeneration, the grace of Jesus Christ, and now to go in quest of the false joys which the same infernal spirit affords you at balls and plays. They would tell me, that the church, in this respect, had exerted her discipline with extreme rigour, and that this rigour was sometimes carried to such a pitch, that it proved sometimes an obstacle to the conversion of infidels. Insomuch, (says Tertullian,) that well nigh as many were found to keep back from our holy faith, for fear of being debarred from these divertisements, which it condemned, as for fear of undergoing death and martyrdom, with which they were threatened by bloody tyrants.

This, I say, is what these holy doctors would tell me, and what they tell you. This is their tradition, these their reflections, this their doctrine. Take notice: I do not say that this was the doctrine of one of these great men, but of them all; so that all of them, with one unanimous consent, were agreed in this point, had all but

one voice, and not unfrequently the same expressions. I do not say that this was their doctrine at one time, which changed at another: from age to age they succeeded one another, and in every age they renewed the same prohibitory rules, taught the same maxims, made the same declarations. I do not say that this was the doctrine of weak and unintelligent men, narrow in their views, and timid or precipitate in their decisions. Setting aside their sanctity, which renders their memory venerable to us, we know they were the prime geniuses of the world. Their writings are come down to us, and in our hands; and in them we discover the sublimity of their wisdom, the penetration of their minds, and the depth and extent of their erudition. I do not say that this was a doctrine tending only to inculcate works of perfection, and of mere counsel; we need but weigh their words, and take them in the most natural and obvious sense. Upon what other subject have they explained their sentiments with more rigour? Of what have they made us more to apprehend the dreadful consequences? And to what have they attributed more fatal effects? I do not say that this was a doctrine founded in particular reasons, and owing to the particular circumstances of the times. They gave no other reasons than we give; they had no other to give. What they said against the stage, assemblies, and balls, from which we use our endeavours to withhold you, that we also say; and what they said, we have as good a right to say as they had. In fine, I do not say that this was a doctrine addressed to certain states and conditions, to certain characters and understandings. They distinguished neither quality, nor rank, nor constitution, nor disposition. They spoke to Christians like you, and they spoke to all. In vain did some make the same answer that is still made, on which St. Chrysostom excellently remarks: "Whatever I see, and whatever I hear, diverts me, and no more; otherwise, it makes no impression on me, neither am I in the least affected with it. A ridiculous excuse, which they deemed a disguisement and insincerity, or at least a delusion, and an error in judgment: a disguisement and insincerity, because they well knew that it was a pretext of which the most profligate would sometimes avail themselves; at least a delusion and an error in judgment, because they well knew how glad people are to impose on themselves, and what progress passion usually makes, which they do not perceive at first, nay, will not perceive, but which is at last but too perceptible.

Now, beloved hearers, what can the partizans of the world object to testimonies so express, so positively declared, and so respectable? Whom will they believe, if they will not submit to such an authority? And would it not be an insufferable rashness, of which no Christian of good sense will ever be guilty, to assert or pretend that these men of God were all in the wrong, that they carried things too far, and that in the present age we are more knowing and enlightened than they were? Nevertheless, there are, who, without hesitation, appeal from all this to their own judgments, and make no conscience, or the least scruple, of that which all the fathers of the church have loudly reprobated, and branded as sinful. Be pleased to consider the whole of the case. Conscience and salvation are the things in question; and all the competent, all the acknowledged and authorized judges in things of this nature, have passed their decision; but some worldlings judge very differently. Mind what I say; some worldlings. For at least if it had been the pastors of the faithful, teachers of morality, ministers of the altar, spiritual directors, preachers of the Word, that now held among us, on the question I am treating, principles not equally severe with those of all antiquity; and if these principles had been generally and constantly followed by the most orthodox part of Christians, perhaps then it might be more supportable that people should examine, and hold arguments. But you know how it is; preachers in the pulpit, directors in the sacred tribunal of penance, doctors in the schools, pastors of the faithful, ministers of the altar, all still hold the same language, which is corroborated by that of all the true children, and the truly faithful of God's church. Who, then, are the rest? I have already said it—some worldlings: that is to say, a certain number of libertine men, lovers of themselves, and fond of pleasure to a great degree; men destitute of learning or knowledge, and without attention to their salvation: and vain women, who know how to deck and dizen their persons, and no more; whose whole ambition is to go abroad, and be taken notice of; whose only care is to kill the tedious hours of life not consecrated to amusements; but, what is infinitely more deplorable, who leave no means untried to feed and inflame their passions, whereas, they should leave no stone unturned to extinguish and deaden it. These are the oracles which would fain be heard, and who, in fact, are heard but too much; these are the great doctors and masters, whose lights put out all other lights, and whose deter-

minations are absolute and unanswerable: these are the guides, whose ways are the straightest; these the sureties we may safely take for our conscience, our salvation, and our eternal welfare. Ah! Christians, I leave you to judge of the matter yourselves, I leave you to draw your own conclusions, while I pass to an article of another nature, equally important, and equally common.

2ndly. For I may reckon, moreover, among criminal diversions, and place them in that class, your fabulous histories, novels, and romances, the reading of which is another occupation at idle times in the present age, and which is attended with the same consequences. These afford subject of conversation to young persons, who employ whole hours in storing their minds with chimerical ideas; who burden their memories with quite imaginary fictions and intrigues, and are very careful to retain the most striking and shining passages; who, know them all, and who knowing them all, know nothing. It would, however, be of little consequence, if they knew nothing, were that the only ill to be feared. But here is the essential and capital point, and on which I would insist, namely; that nothing is more capable to corrupt purity and innocence of heart, than bad books: that nothing diffuses through the whole soul a more subtile, deadly, and speedy poison; and that, therefore, nothing can, with greater reason, be more strictly forbidden. Reason, experience, the avowal of those who have had experience, everything concurs to evince the truth of this assertion. And I ask you, in effect, beloved hearer, you, to whom I speak, and who have within yourself your conscience for a witness to what I say: Is it not true, that proportionably as you addicted yourself to this kind of reading, and it gave you delight, your relish for piety insensibly diminished, and all the warmth of your devotion abated? I say more: is it not true, that by the custom you got of reading such books, the spirit of the world took possession of your heart; that you perceived the spirit of Christianity to slacken, and grow weaker and weaker; that the principles instilled into your mind by a good education, were considerably altered; that your head was filled with ridiculous conceptions of gallantry and vanity; and that everything else, how much soever more solid and serious, became first insipid, then disagreeable, and at last odious and insupportable.

This is not all. But then keep nothing hid from yourself; acknowledge the whole truth of the matter. Is it not true, that by reading such works, and having constantly in your hands such

seeds of depravity, you have admitted imperceptibly into your soul the demon of incontinence? What else gave rise to sensual thoughts? What else excited indelicate sentiments? What else occasioned indecent words? Was it not by these, and the like means, that the flesh predominated over the spirit, and that you became a different person from what you had been till that time? Perhaps it surprises you; but for my part I am not at all surprised at it, as it was impossible, without a miracle, that it should not be so. Having books of that kind, day after day before your eyes, and these books being so infected as they are, it was morally impossible that you should not catch the deadly venom, and that they should not communicate their venom to you. For (to speak in the language of the world, and to use the proper term) what, in strict propriety of speech, is a romance? A history, or, more properly, a fable executed in the form of a history, in which love is handled according to art and rule; in which the ruling passion, and spring of all other passions, is love; in which are expressed, in lively colours, all the foibles, raptures, capriciousness, and extravagance of love; in which nothing is seen but maxims of love, protestations of love, artifice, tricks, and wiles of love; in which every interest (though it were the most dear according to the notions of mankind) is superseded for love; in which an infatuated man is governed by nothing but love, insomuch, that love is his whole occupation, his whole life, his whole object, his end, his happiness, his God and all. Tell me if I exaggerate; but tell me at the same time how, so frail as we are, and so prone to evil, it is possible such thoughts should run incessantly in the imagination, without making a deep impression on the heart? How should the greatest saints resist them? Would not even an angel be overcome by them? Would not they make innocence herself to fail, and to suffer shipwreck? Or, tell me how, in a religion so pure and holy as ours, a Christian can be allowed to expose the purity of his heart to so evident and immediate a ruin?

But you will object: The books I read treat of honourable love. It is a mistaken notion, beloved hearers. Do you call that honourable, which possesses a man, and bewitches him to that degree as to deprive him of sense and reason, takes up all his thoughts, engrosses all his care, and, at the expense of the Creator, makes him an adorer of a creature? Do you call that honourable, which makes a man forget the most sacred duties he owes to nature, to

his country, to justice, to honour, and to charity? And is it not frequently to that end the whole drift of a romance tends?

But this kind of reading is instructive for young persons, as it gives them a knowledge of the world. Ah! Christians, is a knowledge of the world so necessary for you, that you should, for the sake of it, give up your salvation? And were it not better to be eternally ignorant of the ways of the world, than not save your soul upon those terms? Yes, truly; these books will give you an insight into the ways of the world, but of what world? Of a pagan world; of an impious and perverted world; of a world condemned by the laws of Christ Jesus; of a world, the worst and most dangerous enemy you have to combat with. Now only examine whether these be the documents you would wish to follow; whether there be not another world to which you might restrict yourself; whether there be not among the Christian people another kind of politeness than that which paves the way to damnation; whether there be not another kind of masters to instruct you and teach you the ways of the world.

Fathers and mothers, this is an excellent lesson for you. I shall close this first part with it; and I supplicate the Almighty that you may comprehend the whole force and consequence of it. You have children to bring up; and after having first used your best endeavours to inspire them with sentiments of Christian piety and religion, I must needs own, lays you under no prohibition to teach them a genteel carriage and polite behaviour. But to supply them yourselves, under this hellish pretext, with books that give their minds a bent to whatever is vicious in the world; to stock your houses with them, and see that they read whatever comes out of that sort; to examine them, and hear with complacency the exact account they give; to think them clever and well instructed, when they have learned to reply to ambiguous words by other words of loose poetry, which they keep in memory, and repeat accurately; to carry them yourselves—(for this concerns every point of morality I have touched upon)—to carry them yourselves to plays and operas, the more likely to spoil them, because young hearts are the most flexible, and susceptible of impression; to make them observe the most refined and delicate passages, especially the most lively and tender; to make them, yourselves, appear at routes, balls and assemblies, where all things they see are so many lures to seduction and ruin. Of all this, you will have good reason to repent in

this life, and for all this you will be severely punished in the other. As yet these are only diversions for them; but stay till the fire be thoroughly kindled, and these diversions will speedily become, both for you and for them, very serious matters. Will it then be time to stop the conflagration? Will it then be in your power to stop the evils of which you had been yourselves the authors? You will sob and moan for it; but will sobbing and moaning be a sufficient atonement in the presence of God? What excuse will you offer at his bar? Will it be a good plea to say, that you meant to bring up your children, and make them see life? What could you mean but their destruction, and your own too? We must admit, therefore, the proposition on which I grounded my argument, that the greatest part of worldly diversions are deserving of censure; either because in their nature they are impure and criminal, as you have now seen; or, because they are excessive in their extent and measure, as I am going to make appear in the second part.

Part II. All excess, Christians, is a vice; and virtue itself, which is the rule of all good, is neither good nor honourable, when carried beyond its limits. Wise we must be; but it must be with sobriety, as St. Paul tells us: and whoever is too wise, is not wise at all; because wisdom is essentially a state of reason, and consequently, of moderation: "Not to think more highly of himself, than he ought to think, but to think with sobriety." Rom. xii. Now if this be true with respect to virtue, it is much more so with regard to the diversions and pastimes of life. If, to be wise, we must beware of running into excess, with still greater reason should we avoid excess, to divert ourselves wisely. Nevertheless, beloved hearers, there are diversions in the world, in which excess is so very common, that although they might be deemed, in other respects, allowable, lawful, and innocent, they are almost always deserving of condemnation, because almost always carried to excess. I do not take upon me to run them all over. Indeed, nothing is farther from my thoughts; for it would be an endless task. May I then be permitted to enlarge on one, on which I have not, as yet, so fully and clearly discoursed as the subject requires, and which I shall make the whole ground-work of this second part: it is the "play," the origin of a thousand evils; so that I cannot encounter a passion for it with too much vehemence.

You know how it is: they game, and to such an excess, too, that the very persons who are guilty of it are inclined to condemn

it. Let me take, for instance, a professed gamester, and beg of him to tell me, in the presence of God, whether or not he games too much; I say, too much according to reason, Christianity, and conscience; and he will answer in the affirmative. Indeed, in most games, especially those which the custom of the world hath chiefly authorized, there are three sorts of excess, which stand in opposition to reason and religion. Excess in the time taken up with it; excess in the stakes and bets; and excess in the attachment and ardour with which it is pursued; all of which are directly contrary to true piety and the eternal maxims of God's law. Let us not condemn things in speculation; let us talk of what passes before our eyes.

1st. A man of the world shall make play his usual, and almost only occupation: shall have no business more important than play; or more properly, shall have no business, however important, which he is not ready to quit for play; shall consider play, not as a transient amusement, fit to unbend the mind, and ease the fatigues of long labour, or close application and intense study, but as a stated work, a regular employment, a fixed state and condition in life; shall consecrate to play days, weeks, and months, nay, his whole life; for there are gamblers of this sort, and of your own acquaintance. A lady shall so far be a burden to herself, that she can bear neither herself, nor any one else, so long as she is debarred from a pack of cards; shall talk of nothing, shall think of nothing, from morning till night, but quadrille and cards; shall, to hear her talk, want strength to employ some moments of reflection on the truths of salvation, but shall not want a constitution strong enough to spend whole nights in shuffling, and dealing, and talking of cards. Tell me, Christians; doth either of these behave in this with becoming moderation? Is this a Christian way of proceeding? Is this the way of one who seeks God, takes pains for heaven, and lays up treasures for eternity? Is this the business of an evangelical labourer, such as the faithful ought all to be? Of one called by God to dress his vine, and give him an account of every moment to the very last, "until he pay the last farthing?" Matt. v. How does this perpetual play, this play without interruption or respite, this play on all days, and almost every hour of the day, coincide with the great ideas we have of the Christian religion, and which Jesus Christ himself hath described to us in clear terms? For they were neither contrived nor forged by me. The Saviour of the

world hath not spoken to us throughout his gospel of a Christian life, but under the figure of a fight, of traffic, of labour, to make us comprehend that it must be an active and laborious life. Now how can anything be more incompatible than a life of labour, and a life of play?

Is play, then, of every kind, to be imputed to us as a crime? No, beloved hearer; and you may remembe I set out with that declaration. It is not play, but the excess of it that I blame; and in vain shall you answer me, that play in its own nature is not reprehensible; that is not the subject of the present inquiry. When you say that play (I mean a certain kind of play) is indifferent, and when I maintain that play, carried to excess, is criminal, both your proposition and mine are true, and perfectly coincident with one another; but mine admonishes you of an abuse which your's will never reform. Adjust your play agreeably to rule. Allow for play but leisure hours, which God refuses not to nature, and which necessity requires. The service of God, and the practice of religion, must go before play. The sacrifice of the altar, spiritual reading, the divine office and mental prayer, must go before play. The care of your family, of your children, of your servants, and of your business, must go before play. The obligations of your employment, the duties of your profession, the works of mercy, charity, and godliness, must go before play. When you have complied with all this, you may seek relaxation in play, not carried to excess. You may recreate yourself with a peaceful heart; and even (if I may venture so to speak) with a kind of favour and blessing from heaven. I say, with a peaceful heart, because then you will play without passion; because then you will play in the manner you ought to do, and will bring your play to be what it ought to be, that is, a short dissipation, and not a continual occupation; because then you will play a sufficient time to unbend the mind, not so long as to waste your spirits; in short, because then you will not feel the internal worm that gnaws your heart, and reproaches you with the loss of time, and the inutility of your life. I say, even with a kind of favour and blessing from heaven, because then you will direct your play to an end becoming a Christian; allowing yourself this recreation only with a view to do better, and by that means, (if I may so speak,) making even your play meritorious, and worthy of commendation. But so long as play shall take the lead of all other functions, and shall make you forget what

you owe to God, to your neighbour, and to yourself; so long as you shall make no sort of distinction between solemn festivals and other days, but shall waste the precious hours of life in those equally as in these, I will say it is, at least, a criminal dissipation of the time which the goodness of God hath given you, and a shameful profanation, for which you will be answerable to him.

2ndly. One excess brings to another. Excess in the time employed in play, is attended with excess in the sums played for. To play but seldom, yet when you do play, to hazard much; or to hazard a little, but play continually, are two excesses, both the one and the other of which is forbidden by the law of God. But over and above these two excesses, there is a third, which is, to play often, and every time you play to venture a large sum. Do not, however, mistake my meaning, when I say a play in which you hazard a large sum. I speak not only of the great and the rich, but of all in general, and each in particular, conformably to their ability, and station in life. What is nothing for one, is much for another. One may easily bear what would hurt another's circumstances; and what for the former were a small loss, might have fatal consequences for the latter. You have debts to pay; you have a numerous family to maintain, and children to provide for; you have servants' wages to discharge; you have alms to give, and poor to relieve. Your income is scarcely sufficient to answer all these purposes; and if you fulfilled exactly and faithfully all these duties, there would be nothing, or next to nothing, left for play. This is the case of hundreds and thousands. Nevertheless, they will play; and it is a rule of life, a rule to which they unalterably adhere; so that no consideration can draw them from it. Cost what it will, they will go on; and for that purpose, what is their practice? This is the most crying evil of all. Because they cannot pay their debts and play, or cannot play and pay their debts, they let the distresses of their creditors multiply, are insensible to the cries of the workman and tradesman, use indirect means to escape their pursuits and to tie their hands; they put them off from month to month, from year to year, and of this way of acting there is no end; they have nothing to give them, and yet they have enough to throw away at play. Because to keep house and go on with play, is inconsistent with the narrowness of their fortune, they break up house, and save all for play. They see, unconcerned, and without emotion, their chil-

dren in want of common necessaries; they complain of the smallest sums laid out to relieve their wants; they remove them from their sight, and intrust them to strangers, without affording sufficient means for their education; they declare they cannot afford these means, and for all that they find means to play. Because it would lessen their ability to play, if they settled a fair account with their servants, and paid them off, they accept of their service, and insist upon it with rigorous exactness, but never think of making them a suitable recompense for it; it is a subject on which they cannot explain themselves, and to bring it up would give them offence: words they will give them very liberally; promises they will make them as many as they please; they shall have everything they want hereafter, provided they want everything for the present, and that this hereafter, by putting off payment from time to time, shall never come; their affairs are in too distracted a situation to allow them time for play. Because almsdeeds to the needy and poor would be too chargeable, and the liberty of play might suffer by them, this divine precept is not known: they are witnesses to the wants and distresses of their neighbour without fellow-feeling; or, if the heart reluctantly betrays its natural sentiments, the understanding is but too ingenious at finding out pretexts to stop their effects. They are poor themselves, or they willingly call themselves such, when the poor are to be relieved; but poverty vanishes, the moment an opportunity offers to play. From all which it follows, that they sacrifice to play the most inviolable laws and most sacred duties: that play is the first object of their concern; that rather than relinquish it, they choose to relinquish everything else: that when play and other things are put in balance against one another, all other things, how essential soever they may be in themselves, kick the beam. Now what are we to think of this? If it be not excess, produce another more deserving of censure?

But after all, my play is moderate, and very usual. Granted, Christians: but this so very usual a play distresses your creditors, who are not paid a farthing, who might at least find some help toward the necessaries of life, in that of which they are robbed by a very superfluous diversion. This so very usual a play puts it out of your power to supply your children not only with that which a genteel education, and suitable to their birth, requires, but sometimes even with food and raiment. This so very usual a

play deprives your servants of the fruit of their labour, brings them to distress, and ruins all their hopes. This so very usual a play hardens your heart to the sighs and moans of so many wretches who implore your assistance, but who receive nothing from your hands. A play replete with extreme injustice, equally odious to God and men: to God who sees the decrees of his divine Providence frustrated, and his laws violated; to men, who thereby lose the means of subsistence, means to which they are so justly entitled. Ah! beloved hearers, pay your debts: it is your principal obligation. Throw not away for an empty pleasure, the substance of your brethren, and the patrimony of the poor. In your situation you cannot seriously, at least you ought not to think of play. And how little soever you may spend that way, it is always too much, as it is another's property you risk, and squander in the most unprofitable manner. If you play, let it be at your own expense; neither should you forget that you are not at liberty to venture your own, so long as others have charges upon it, charges for which you are responsible. An important maxim is this, which I wish to God it were in my power to impress on the minds of so many of the great, and so many others. Soon should we see gaming tables deserted, if by the laws of the land play were forbidden these debtors; who, far from desisting from it to pay their debts, heap debt upon debt, in order to keep it up, and in the end become insolvent. But if human laws are not express upon this head, what need we more than the gospel law, the law of conscience, and the law of nature.

Let them say, after this, that the times are hard, that they find it difficult to support their rank, that it stands them upon to contract their expenses, and that they cannot part easily with the little they have. I shall not dispute with you, beloved Christians, about the difficulty of the times. Less experienced than you in such matters, I know enough to join issue with you, and to agree that now more than ever it is proper to use a prudent economy in the management of your fortunes. But is not this exactly that which proves your guilt in the clearest manner? What testimony can I bring against you more convincing than your own? For, this appears to me extremely deplorable in the manner of the times. Nothing is talked of but hardships and calamities: it would seem as if heaven had, in its wrath, made all its scourges come down upon earth, to lay it in desolation. Every one holds

the same language. Complaints and lamentations are heard on all sides. But mark the indefensible contradiction. In the midst of these lamentations and complaints, hath the spirit of gaming in the least subsided? Among so many persons of both sexes, have any given up the practice of gaming? Is it less their occupation than it was before? Do they not still play as deep as ever? Tell me, Christians, is not this to insult the public distress? Is it not to outrage the religion you profess? Is it not to kindle up again the anger of heaven? You will tell me, that in fact you have retrenched in your expences. But in what article have you done so? Is it in that of play? By no means. In what then? Why, in that of bread, for want of which, those who should receive it are almost lost. In common necessaries to support your family, in order to find means of going on with play. In everything that hath no relation to play; or, rather, in every thing that may help out play, not applying it even to the most essential purposes.

I know that to consider things in speculation only, and at the first view, some will suppose I exaggerate the matter, and carry it beyond the due bounds. But examine it in practice, consult your own knowledge, give attention to what passes all around you, and you will own, that instead of overstraining the point, there are other extravagances to which play leads, and which I have not so much as hinted at. For, what would you think, should I mention a wife, who, by play, from which the strongest and most serious remonstrances cannot withhold her, loses on one hand whatever her husband scrapes together on the other, and is on the watch for opportunities to deceive him, and to pocket what money she can for play? Should I mention a husband, who, going reciprocally from debauchery to play, and from play to debauchery, ventures all he is worth in the world, goods and chattels, house and lands, and makes the fate of his family depend upon one cast of a die? Should I mention a young heir, who, without conduct or reflection, borrows on all sides and from all sorts of people; and unable as yet to mortgage an estate which he hath not, cuts himself out at least from his right by anticipation, and holds at nought the loss of his patrimony, provided he may play?

These instances are not, perhaps, so common as they were in times past; but are they not sufficiently so to let you see the

heinousness of excess in play? Some perhaps, grown wise from necessity, in these hard and unfruitful years, have moderated their play in some degree; but is this sufficient? Doth this destroy all the evils of play it ought to destroy in the present conjuncture, and in your present situation? Doth it put you in a condition to fulfil, according to the best of your ability, all your duties? And if it doth not, is not your play carried to excess? Excess not only by loss of time, and loss of money, but moreover in the attachment and ardour with which it is pursued.

3rdly. What a sight to behold a circle of people, employed about a game which entirely possesses them, and which alone suggests reflections to their minds, and desires to their hearts! What steadfast and immovable looks! You must not disturb them one moment, not once interrupt them, especially if they are actuated by a lust of gain, which is mostly the case. What different agitations infect the soul, just as the capriciousness of hazard varies! Hence sacred vexation and melancholy; hence bitterness and disgust; hence sorrow and despondency, anger and violence, blasphemy and imprecations. I am well aware of what the good-breeding of the times prescribes on these occasions. It teaches you to affect a coolness of temper, an easy manner, and a cheerful countenance, to suppress the swellings and tumults of your heart, and to disguise your feelings. In this consists one of the chief accomplishments for play, one of the most reputable characteristics of a gamester. But whatever cheerfulness he may show in his looks, is the tempest in his breast the less violent for that? And is it not a double mortification, to feel internally the whole force of it, and be obliged, from I know not what principle of honour, to dissemble it externally. This then is what the world denominates diversion; but what, for my part, I denominate a passion, nay, one of the most tyrannical and criminal passions. And tell me sincerely, beloved hearers, do you really think that this was the meaning of Almighty God, when he allowed you certain dissipations of mind, and certain recreations? Can he who is reason itself, approve of a play that shocks reason? Can he who is essentially regularity itself, permit a play that is totally irregular?

It is much better, you say, to play, than to speak ill of one's neighbour, than to form plots, than to indulge one's mind with dangerous ideas. A fine pretext, indeed! I answer: you must neither speak ill of your neighbour, nor form plots, nor admit into

your mind sensual ideas, nor play, as you do, without measure or limitation. Though your life were free from every other fault, this alone would be sufficient for your condemnation. To conclude, I affirm, that the greatest part of worldly diversions are highly censurable, because they are scandalous in their effects, as I am going to set forth in the third and last part.

PART III. St. Chrysostom observes, that the manner in which Jesus Christ expresses himself concerning whatever gives us scandal, is very surprising. If your eye (says this divine Redeemer) be a cause of scandal to you, pull it out; or, should it be your hand, cut it off; or, should it be your foot, spare it not, because it is better to lose your hand, your foot, your eye, your whole body, than run the risk of losing your soul. Why, think ye, Christians, did the Son of God make use of this example of the foot, the eye, the hand? It was (says St. Chrysostom) to let us understand, that we are bound to forego even things the most necessary, such as concern us the most nearly, and which, it should seem, we should have most occasion for in the common occurrences of life, when they make us fall, whatever the manner of it may be, and lead to sin. Whether it be the cause or occasion of sin, is of no consequence. The cause of sin, the occasion of sin, a distinction equally subtile and unnecessary. If my sin be owing to an occasion of sinning, I incur damnation as much as if I had sinned any other way. God, therefore, obliges me as strictly to fly from the occasion of sin, as from the cause of sin, how advantageous soever in other respects, and even how necessary soever, this occasion may seem to be for me. Nothing in the natural course of things is more precious to me than my eye, nothing in the common actions of life more useful than my hand, it is my foot that supports me and bears me along. And yet to prevent a mortal fall, of which I should run the hazard by keeping them, it is incumbent on me to spare neither eye, nor foot, nor hand. We must sacrifice all, in order to preserve what is essential and capital, which is the life of the soul: "If thy hand, or thy foot, scandalize thee, cut it off, and cast it away from thee." Matt. xvii. This, beloved hearers, is the true meaning of our Saviour's words.

Now with how much more reason ought this great maxim to be made a rule concerning diversions? There are diversions, it must be owned, which in themselves are not criminal, and the

use of which goes not to any remarkable excess. Nevertheless, Almighty God hath a right to forbid you, and in fact forbids you, the enjoyment of them. The reason is this: they may be dangerous occasions for you of offending God, and in the circumstances with which they are attended, there may be a scandal which you are indispensably obliged to shun. On all other occasions, they would be allowable; at every other time, they are even praiseworthy; but in such a place, at such an hour, in such company, you are forbidden to appear, strictly forbidden, because in that case you endanger your innocence, and risk the critical work of salvation. And whereas in the critical work of salvation all is personal, and whereas the goodness or badness of our actions depends on the relation they bear to ourselves, when the point is to determine whether or not I shall indulge myself with a diversion, or use self-denial, the general notion of mankind is a wrong standard whereby to form my determination; for if I perceive that some way or other it may mortally wound my conscience, I am obliged in conscience to desist from it, and to keep my distance; to cut off, and cast away. This is the doctrine which faith teaches, these are the dictates of right reason.

A particular instance, beloved Christians, will put my meaning in a clearer light. Of all diversons, is there one more innocent, or more indifferent in its own nature, than to take the air in public gardens, and in such other places of resort? And of all diversions in the world, is it not that which is least exposed to the shafts of censure, and in which, it should seem, the laws of conscience had least matter for reformation? Nevertheless, I maintain (and you know how it is as well as I do) that there are diversions of this nature which look suspicious; that there are others undeniably bad; that there are others downright scandalous; and that this scandal regards not only libertine souls, enlisted under the banners of vice, but even those who have, or seem to have, in other respects, a horror of them, and are estranged from them. Profane times! what have ye not corrupted, and where have ye not spread your malignant influence? You are not at a loss, beloved hearers, to comprehend my meaning; and truly to comprehend it is no hard matter. You know to what pass are come certain places of public resort, and what happens in them every day. You know on what account the preference is given them before all others, and for what purpose they are resorted to. A tumultuous concourse, a

confused multitude, a scene of pageantry, frivolousness, and vanity. If there is a human beauty to be produced and made known, if an ornamental attire and sparkling gems are to be displayed, is it not there that they attract the eyes of the admiring people? In the midst of so many different objects, who, one after another, and as it were by so many regular evolutions, pass incessantly and repass, what engages the eye? With what kind of thoughts is the mind taken up? Which are the feelings of the heart? And on what topic doth conversation turn?

This scandal is the more dangerous, because the danger of it is not perceived. How many of my hearers, not excepting those who make open profession of the gospel law, and mean to lead a life conformable to it, accuse me, perhaps, for carrying the severity of the evangelical doctrine beyond the due bounds! They will agree with me upon all I have said respecting the stage, gaming, spectacles, assemblies, books; and if I had said a great deal more, they would agree with me upon it. But that I should run down a pleasurable walk in a public garden; that I should pretend there are measures to be kept, and precautions to be taken, upon that head; that I should be of opinion that a Christian matron ought not to expose there a young person, without circumspection and reflection; that I should maintain she ought to consider time, place, and circumstances, which she had hitherto made so light of: all this will be looked upon as exaggeration, and they will hardly be prevailed upon to give me credit for it. But I know what the fathers of the church have said of it, and it is to their judgment that I appeal. For, it is not in these later ages that this kind of scandal was first known, and that the preachers of the Word, and spiritual directors, have endeavoured to banish it from the kingdom of God. I know what St. Ambrose hath said concerning it in his excellent tract of "The Institution of Virgins." I know what St. Jerom hath written, not in one, but in sundry treatises on the same subject. These great men were filled with and guided by the Spirit of God, and thoroughly qualified to prescribe rules for the modelling and training up young persons in a manner suitable to the holiness of their state: but they prescribed them rules, and gave them documents, that would rectify your notions in regard to those methods of killing the time, which appear to you so proper and so lawful. They took it for granted, that a young lady should never go abroad but with extreme

reserve, and all the circumspection of a particular modesty: that a prudent retirement should be her element, and the business and care of the family her ordinary occupation and study; that if occasionally she withdrew from it, it should be for some pious or necessary purpose; that if it were thought expedient and proper sometimes to indulge in some innocent amusement, she must avoid and guard against not only suspicion, but the very shadow of suspicion; that she should not take a single step but under the eyes of a discreet, cautious, watchful mother, and that to disappear a single moment, were to hurt the integrity of her reputation; that she should never be seen without some one responsible for her conduct, and a witness to everything she said and did; in fine, that such a subjection, far from being disagreeable, ought to give her pleasure, that she ought to love it for her own sake and comfort, and that so soon as she endeavoured to get rid of it, it must appear to prognosticate no good to her virtue. Thus these holy doctors have treated this subject. What would they have said of walks and airings, the whole agreeableness of which consists in pomp and attire; for which people dress and decorate themselves as for a ball, and to which they repair with the same spirit, and with all the pride and ostentation of luxury; at which, as though they were public exhibitions, each, at one and the same time, is actor and spectator, plays his own part, and personates himself? What would they have said of those solitary walks, in which a premeditated and well-contrived chance brings persons together, and occasions seemingly accidental meetings, though real assignations? What would they have said—I say no more, beloved hearers: it is a respect due to the sacred place in which we are assembled. So great is the evil, that even decency obliges me to suppress it; neither can I reproach you with it more effectually than by silence.

But, beloved Christians, what ought you to think of all this? And what have not so many girls and women of the world to fear from it? Are they more holy than was Eustochium, than was Blasilla, than were so many others to whom St. Jerom was wont to dictate such salutary lessons? Are the corruption and depravity of the present age not as contagious as were those of ancient times? And are there fewer rocks to be dreaded in these days, than were in the days of that father? Ah! beloved hearers, consider the infinite evils that may be caused, and that are daily caused,

by a life of dissipation, especially in regard to persons of the sex, and by the execrable liberty of which they are in possession. Were I to discourse with you upon that subject, and were you to give me your opinion with frankness, what might I not learn from your knowledge and experience? It was there that such a communication began, there the first opportunity offered, there the intrigue was first contrived. You know them, and can give an exact account of them. But, very probably, you would not reckon among them those which ought to be most interesting to you; and you perceived not, because you are better informed of that which concerns others than yourselves. Be that as it may, with all the knowledge which you have, and which, no doubt, ought to be sufficient, how can you overlook so important a point? Can you suffer a licentiousness, the danger of which you are well apprised of, and which it is so necessary to put a stop to? Can you suffer it in those who are nearest to you by all the ties of blood and affection, in those for whom you are answerable to God in a special manner, inasmuch as he has submitted them to your directions, and entrusted them to your vigilance? But if the toleration of it be forbidden you, what must it be to try to justify it, to approve of it, to encourage it, to authorise it? And you, Christian souls; if in your regard, too condescending parents should persist in so base and criminal a toleration, how can you make use of it? Ought you not to give it over as a glaring scandal? Do you not perceive into what a gulf of iniquity it is capable of pushing you headlong?

How then! Are we obliged to give up every kind of diversion? To this I shall give a two-fold answer. In the first place, I answer, that if every diversion in the world hath one or other of the three characteristics I have been enlarging upon, and is either criminal in its own nature, or excessive in its extent, or scandalous in its effects, there is not a diversion in the world, of which you ought not to have an utter abhorrence, far from seeking or procuring it. The reason is, that there is not one of these three characteristics which is not sufficient alone to damn you; and that there is not a diversion in the world, which can make compensation for the loss of your soul, and which you ought not to sacrifice to your salvation. You will not, I own, lead so agreeable and pleasant a life; it will be even insipid, irksome, and melancholy: and should you be obliged to carry things as far as they can possibly go, it will be, according to nature, dreadful. But never forget the words of my

text, and what the Son of God tells you in the persons of the apostles: "Ye shall weep and lament, but the world will rejoice." The world will rejoice in the pleasures of the senses, and will relish their sweetness; while tears and afflictions, and the bitter cup of sorrow, shall fall to your share. Nevertheless, your lot will be preferable to all the joys of the world; because the joys of the world will vanish speedily, and will terminate in eternal wo: whereas, your sufferings will be changed into happiness, a perfect happiness that shall never have an end. Now, as such is your hope, I leave you to judge whether or not you ought to forego the pleasures of the world, and whether or not the sacrifice of them ought to give you uneasiness. But, in the second place, there are, what I have already granted, and what I grant again, recreations and diversions of more kinds than one. Some are commendable, without excess and without danger; and this is the kind that is allowed you. The primitive Christians themselves had their days and hours of rejoicing but a Christian rejoicing; that is, they rejoiced with wisdom and circumspection, and in a manner suitable to their profession. Do you follow this rule, and the gospel will have no objection to it.

What do I say, beloved hearers? Proceed we farther; and as the prophet advises, if we must rejoice, let it not be in any one, or in anything, saving in the Lord. The apostle St. Paul wished earnestly that the faithful might be filled with joy of every kind; and what he so earnestly wished his disciples, I wish you with the same earnestness. With this same teacher of the Gentiles, I say to you: "Rejoice, my brethren, nay, incessantly rejoice." But what kind of joy ought this to be? That internal, spiritual, and holy joy, with which Almighty God replenishes the soul that seeks him in truth, that seeks him only, that aspires to him only, and that wishes to repose in him only. That divine joy which is above the senses, and beyond the comprehension of the terrestrial and carnal man. Put yourselves in a disposition to taste its sweets, and you will enjoy them. It is not in the noise and hurry of the world, not at plays, or routs, or balls, or gaming-tables, that they are to be found, but in silence and solitude, and in the repose of a holy and retired life. The more you renounce these human entertainments, with the greater abundance this heavenly joy will dilate your hearts; it will spread itself through them, it will fill them with transports, it will make them overflow with immeasurable delight. Such is the promise which I make with confidence, and

for which my vouchers are all the saints that have ever lived, or that are still living upon earth. Did they impose upon us respecting this matter, or were they mistaken? Was the royal psalmist in an error, when he said, that "one day with God, and in the house of God, was better for him than ten thousand with sinners in the midst of pleasures?" Were St. Paul and so many others in an error, when, from the experimental knowledge they had of it, they declared that nothing could be compared with the secret unction and consolation which God communicates to those who love, fear, and serve him? Let us rely on their word, or rather, let us rely on the Word of God, who hath promised, if we are willing, to make us happy in time, and to all eternity.

SERMON XIV.

ON AN ERRONEOUS CONSCIENCE.

For the Third Sunday of Advent.

"*They said unto him, who art thou, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What sayest thou of thyself? He replied: I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord.*" JOHN i.

To have been chosen by God, beloved Christians, in order to prepare in the minds of men, the way of the Messiah, whose coming he foretold, did great honour to St. John the Baptist. Had he collected together every kind of praise that was any way applicable to his person or to his ministry, he could not have better, or more completely succeeded, than by letting his humility speak, against his will, which bears such signal testimony in his favour: "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness." For he must, to be this precursor, have been not only a prophet, and more than a prophet, but an angel upon earth; as it was of him, according to our Saviour's own interpretation, that God said heretofore by the mouth of his prophet Malachi, speaking of his Son: "Behold! I

send my angel before thy face, who shall prepare thy way before thee." Matt. xi.

Although, Christians, I am neither angel nor prophet, it is the will of God that I should perform the same duty which St. John the baptist did to Christ; and that, after the example of this glorious harbinger, I should cry out, not in the wilderness, but in the midst of this court, "Make straight the way of the Lord." It is your God that comes to you, be prepared to receive him; prepare the blessed way within yourselves, the way which brings you to him, and which brings him to you. It was to that end John the baptist was sent into Judea, and it is to that end I appear in the pulpit; it is to point out, and make known to you the way of the Lord, a way far distant from the way of the world. Religion informs us, that it is a holy way, and wo be to me, should I offer to represent it in another light. To come to the knowledge of this holy way, by which we must arrive in our heavenly country, and to find out the opposite, in the view of shunning it, is the scope and intent of this discourse.

It is within ourselves, in the recesses of our heart, that we shall find an explanation of the words I have cited for my text from the gospel. The way of the Lord, which must be made straight, is our own conscience. The straight way, which in order to be qualified to receive Jesus Christ, we are bound to pursue, is our conscience regulated by the law of God. The winding way, which we are obliged to make straight, is our conscience perverted by the false maxims and delusions of the world. The deceitful way, which terminates in death, is an erroneous conscience, which the sinner forms. The infallible way, which leads to life, is the delicate conscience of the worthy Christian. This, beloved hearers, is the purport of all that St. John preached: "Make straight the way of the Lord."

Now, that you may profit by so important an instruction, I shall, in this instruction, set forth the irregularity of a wrong conscience, which is the way of reprobation, directly opposite to the way of the Lord. In order, if possible, to preserve you from it, I shall endeavour to show how easy it is to form a wrong conscience; how dangerous it is, or rather how pernicious, to act upon the principles of a wrong conscience; lastly, how unavailing it is in the presence of God, to try, by alleging a wrong conscience, to excuse and palliate our bad conduct. Three positions, of which I beseech you

to take with you, in your minds, the arrangement and texture, as they make the heads of the following discourse:

First: it is easy to adopt an erroneous conscience.

Secondly: it is dangerous to be guided by an erroneous conscience.

Thirdly: an erroneous conscience is a frivolous allegation in the presence of God.

PART I. Were the law of God the only certain rule of our actions, and were our lives to rest solely on the maxims of that first and essential law, of which God is the author, we might say, my brethren, that sin was no more, and that we should all be perfect and impeccable Christians. Our errors, irregularities, backslidings and deviations in the way of salvation, proceed from this, that, besides the law of God, another rule must be followed, on which depends the uprightness of our actions: or rather, from this, that the law of God, which is the general rule of all human actions, must be applied to man, in a particular manner, by another more near and immediate rule, and that is conscience. For, what is conscience? The angelical doctor, St. Thomas, tells it us in a few words: it is the application which every one makes to himself of the law of God. Now you know full well, being convinced by experience, that every one makes application of this law of God to himself, according to his understanding, particular views, and cast of mind: nay, more, according to the secret movements and present disposition of his heart; insomuch, that the application of this divine law, far from being in practice a certain rule, either in doing good, or avoiding evil, is often made a rule, of which we make use, and of which we avail ourselves, sometimes to do evil, and sometimes to plead exemption from the most inviolable obligations of doing good. Be pleased to take my meaning, and endeavour along with me to discuss thoroughly so important a difficulty.

True it is, Christians, that the law of God, considered absolutely, and relatively to God, who is its first cause, is a plain and uniform law, an invariable and unalterable law; a law (according to the royal prophet) holy and reprehensible: "The law of the Lord is unspotted." Ps. xviii. But the law of God, understood by man, explained by man, fashioned by the mind, and digested according to the conscience of man, assumes as many different shapes, as there are minds and consciences of different kinds; is as liable to change as the man who observes, or pretends to observe it, is him-

self, by the natural inconstancy of his temper, liable to change; shall I say it? Is as susceptible not only of imperfection, but of corruption, as ourselves, in the abuse of it, even when we imagine that our whole conduct is directed by it. It is the law of God, I grant; but one interprets it in this manner, another in that, and thus it loses its proper character of plainness and uniformity. It is the law of God; but according to the different situations we are in, to-day we contract it, and to-morrow we enlarge it; at one time we consider it in its full rigour, at another we abate of its severity and exactness: and thus, in our regard, it hath no stability. It is the law of God; but by idle reasoning, we adapt it to our opinions and depraved inclinations; and thus it degenerates in our minds from its purity and holiness. In a word, by the close connexion subsisting between it and the consciences of men, though the law of God, it is mingled with our notions, and confounded with our iniquities. But I will be more explicit on so important a subject, which cannot be placed easily in a point of light sufficiently clear:

Every one, whatever kind of life he may lead, forms a conscience of his own; and I grant that to form one is undoubtedly necessary. For (as the apostle says) "whatever is not according to faith is sin." Rom. xiv. Now, St. Paul, in this text, by faith, understood conscience, and not merely faith; or, if you like that better, reduced practical faith to conscience. This is the universal opinion of the fathers; and it evidently appears from the very context. That is, not to sin, we must have a conscience; and whoever acts without conscience, or against conscience, though the very thing he doth should be good and praiseworthy, sins by doing it. But we cannot hence infer, urging by contraries, that whatever is done according to conscience, is not sinful. This is, beloved hearers, what I mean to impart to you; a thing you must know, if you would know your religion, namely: that as conscience, so what is according to conscience, is not always right. There are insincere consciences, corrupt consciences, seared consciences, as the scripture calls them: that is, consciences blackened and disfigured with crimes, and founded in sin; and deeds performed according to such consciences, cannot be better, or have any other qualities than the consciences themselves. One may act, therefore, according to conscience, and yet commit sin; and what is more strange, it may be sinful to act according to conscience, because

there are consciences, according to which it is wrong to act; and which, being big with sin, can generate but sin. In forming a conscience, one may incur everlasting woes; because there are consciences of a certain sort, which, seeing the manner in which they are formed, lead inevitably to perdition, and are the never-failing sources of damnation.

Now, I hold that it is easy to form this kind of conscience; I hold that the higher your rank is, the more easily your conscience falls under this category. I hold that consciences of this nature are formed with less difficulty in certain stations that compose and distinguish the great scenes of life in which you are taken up. Can a Christian be persuaded of these great truths, and not collect his wandering thoughts, and acknowledge before God the part he hath taken in this irregularity?

1st. I have said it was easy to form a wrong conscience. The reason is, that nothing is more easy, nothing more natural, than to make conscience tally with our interest or desires; in both of which cases, it is irregular and erroneous. And, first, it is irregular for this single reason, because it is formed according to our desires. The proof is unanswerable, and borrowed from St. Augustin. It is this; that our desires, in the general dispensation of things, which is the dispensation of God, should be adapted to conscience, and not conscience to desires. Nevertheless, my brethren, (says this holy doctor,) this is the delusion, this the iniquity, if we be not on our guard, into which we are perpetually in danger of falling. Instead of regulating our desires by our consciences, we regulate our consciences by our desires. And as our consciences are founded in our desires, what is the consequence? That the object to which we are impelled by inclination, hath, proportionably to the impulse, the appearance of good. At first, it seems agreeable, or useful, or convenient; next, it is allowable, innocent, and becoming; and by a certain kind of progress, peculiar to error, of which we have many and glaring instances, at last we believe it arises from virtue. This is the consequence of that ascendant which the heart insensibly gains over the understanding, compelling us to frame our judgment of things, not as they really are in themselves, but as we would really have them to be; and if we could make them either good or bad, according to our disposition, and our will had the power of giving them what form soever it pleased. Of those who now hear me, let each impartially search

his heart, and perhaps but few will be able to affirm, that this reproach doth not nearly concern them.

And for this reason, when the psalmist speaks of the pernicious errors and detestable maxims which influence mankind, and actuate gradually the sinner's conscience, he never fails to add, that he, the sinner, conceives them in his heart, that he fixes them in his heart, that his heart is the source from which they flow, and that he says in his heart whatever is capable to confirm him in wickedness.

Had he hearkened to his reason, his reason would have told him the direct contrary. Had he consulted his faith, his faith in this, in concert with reason, would have answered, "thou art wrong; there is a law which forbids thee, under pain of death, the deed thou dost meditate without remorse. There is a supreme tribunal, at which thou shalt be judged, and sentence will be passed on thee as that law directs. There is an all-powerful God, of whose attributes, the most inseparable from his essence is his Providence; and part of that Providence is, the rigorous justice with which he will eternally punish thy crime." This, the sinner, notwithstanding his impiety, learns from religion by the light even of reason. But as he would follow the dictates of his heart, his heart, intent on seduction, spoke another language. It said, that his reason, in such and such cases, did not lay him under, with that strictness, so great an obligation. It said that his religion made not reprobation, that worst of evils, the irreparable consequence of so slight a transgression. It said that his faith would be greatly overstrained, should he imagine God's vengeance in such a degree. And in this manner he sets his conscience at ease.

Now is anything more easy, than thus to model it to his own liking? Show me the man who is not strongly inclined to suppose, to decide, to conclude, to do all things according to the passion that rules him. How great is his propensity to think that which favours it, just and reasonable, and to reject as improper what would help to restrain it! Of all the passions, let us single out that which is best known, and which is the most common. You have a criminal connexion, and you would reconcile it with conscience. To what shifts are you driven to gain your end! If your business be to regulate certain intimacies, to retrench certain liberties, to avoid certain occasions, which nourish and foment this abominable passion: from the first moment that the heart is

enthralled, with how many false, but specious reasons, doth it furnish the head, to extend, in that, the bounds of conscience! To shake off the yoke of the precept by mitigating its rigour and austerity! To call in question what is evidently just! And to controvert undeniable and visible facts! For instance: to disown the scandal, though evident and public; to maintain that the occasion is neither immediate nor voluntary, though both the one and the other; to allege pretexts for persisting in, and seeming impossibilities of desisting from, your evil communications; to justify and varnish your wilful delays. If we attentively consider the nature of man, when passion and duty are inwardly at variance, or, rather, when the heart hath taken its resolution, what a miracle would it be, should he keep his conscience, in that situation, from running into error!

But if a wrong conscience be easily formed by adapting it to our desires, it is still more so by adapting it to our interest. And here I must beseech you to renew your attention. For (as St. Chrysostom rightly observes) it is interest in particular that excites desires, and gives them that quickness so apt to darken the understandings of men in the way of salvation. Why so many erroneous consciences in the world, but because on no consideration can people be induced to forego their interest? Why do they stifle, on a thousand occasions, the most lively remorses in what evidently clashes with the law of God, but because there are none, which the thirst of lucre, still more lively, and self-interest, still more prevalent and forcible than conscience, are not capable of stifling? Where these are not concerned, we easily preserve a right conscience, and are severely regular in matters concerning moral obligations. There is nothing in them burdensome which we do not approve of, and even relish. We judge of them rationally, we speak of them feelingly, we abhor whatever is not conformable to the purity of our intentions. But is our interest in question? Doth an occasion offer, in which, unluckily, our interest and this purity of principle jar? You know, Christians, how ingenious we are at finding our expedients to run into error. Our understanding is weakened, our severity slackens, our sight is dimmed by the corruptions of the world, we no longer behold things in the true light. What we once thought too favourable to corrupt nature, upon close examination is found to be rational. What gave us offence, and we looked upon as scandalous, is not

so invidious. What we reckoned indefensible, wears another aspect, and seems just and warrantable: what we blamed in others, begins to be lawful and excusable for ourselves; we reason, perhaps, a little with ourselves; but we yield at last; and that private interest, which we cannot lose hold of, by an inherent quality, surprisingly efficacious, gives what bias turn it pleases to our consciences.

In what are our consciences mostly exact? And in what do we display a nicety of maxims? Let us own it sincerely: in that which hath no connexion with our interest; in that which concerns only the business of others; in that which hath no relation to ourselves. That is, we are conscious for our neighbour to a degree of severity, because we have no interest in being remiss for another, and because, by that means, more credit and respect accrue to ourselves at another's cost. But, at the same time, by a gross blindness, which few faithful souls can guard against thoroughly, each one is conscientious in his own regard, as the necessity of his affairs, the advancement of his fortune, the success of his undertakings—in a word, as the occasion requires, and his interest admits.

And hence it is, that error and iniquity have made such progress in the minds of men. Hear a layman discourse on matters of conscience regarding ecclesiastics, it is an oracle that speaks, whose insight is unparalleled; but hear him argue for himself, or rather judge, by his conduct, and you will find that he hath scarce any conscience at all, and this supposed oracle shall move your compassion.

Shall I make you sensible, beloved hearers, of this great truth? It is so important, it should be placed in the clearest point of view. Mind my supposition. Should I collect together, in this discourse, whatever hath been taught, upon this subject, by divines the most moderate, and the farthest from carrying their opinions to an excess of indiscreet severity; nay, by divines the most indulgent, divines suspected, whether with or without reason, of inclining to relax in doctrines of morality: should I collect together, I say, all that they have taught, and all that they maintain to be of strict obligation, the consciences of those who are the most earnest and bitter in their invectives against them and their doctrines, would not, oftentimes, be disposed to submit to them. How indulgent soever they are supposed to be, should I here relate, without

addition or diminution, their opinions and decisions, in so many words upon certain heads, respecting the interests of mankind, and should I apply them to some who pretend to an uncommon delicacy af conscience, few there would be, of all those who hear me, whom I should not thereby put out of countenance; and, perhaps, if their minds were rightly known, I should offend and disgust them. Should I remonstrate, for instance, to a beneficed clergyman, how far these theologists carry their severity, on five or six articles, of which I shall supersede the disagreeable recital, were he sincere and honest, in any degree, he would humble himself, and own, in the presence of God, that as yet he was far from that scrupulous exactness, and nice punctuality, with which he flattered himself he was possessed; but if truth can hurt him ever so little, he will take offence at this. Were I to address myself to him only, all others who hear me, having no concern in it, would applaud my zeal, and unanimously agree that I was quite in the right. But were I to enlarge on so copious a subject, and expatiate freely on their personal faults, and particular stations; were I to proceed from the churchman to the statesman, from the statesman to the magistrate, from the magistrate to the merchant, from the merchant to the tradesman; were I, exerting the sacred liberty peculiar to the pulpit, to point out to each of them wherein consisted, if he meant to adopt them in good earnest, the rigour and strictness of Christian morals; were I to convince him, as I easily might, that it is in this particular he takes great latitudes, which he neither perceives or thinks of; were I to make him sensible of those latitudes, and, without regard or deference to his person, to set them before his eyes: yes, I say it again, my whole audience would well nigh rise up in opposition to my sentiments. And why? Ah! Christians, here is the inconsistency. We are for strict morals in theory, but not in practice; strict morals that would oblige us to nothing, that would give us no trouble, that would lay us under no restraint; strict morals according to our taste, our notions, our humour, our interest; strict morals for others, but not for ourselves; strict morals that would leave us the liberty to judge, to speak, to rally, to censure; in a word, we are for strict morals that have no existence. And hence it is, that, notwithstanding this supposed zeal for strict morals in the Christian religion, people every day form erroneous consciences.

2ndly. But I said, and I repeat it, that the great are particu-

larly exposed to the misfortune of a wrong conscience. The duty inseparably annexed to my ministry, and the zeal for your salvation with which God inspires me, will not suffer me to pass over in silence so essential a truth. They are more exposed than others, for a thousand evident and convincing reasons, which cannot be too frequently the object of contemplation. Their affairs are too complicated to be reconcileable, at all times, and in all places, with the law of God, and must be apt, of course, to be the matter and groundwork of a wrong conscience. Is it not from interested and selfish views, that in their prospects and undertakings the will of heaven is seldom attended to? The spring of conscience is often relaxed by that of politics? That politics are the rule in important concerns, while conscience is listened to, and decides in matters only of little moment? That what is called their interest is scarce ever weighed in the scale of that judgment, in which they themselves will one day be weighed? As if immunities and privileges had been granted to their interest, which was denied to themselves; as if human policy had the power of prescribing against the rights of God; as if conscience were a bond of the vulgar only. They are more exposed than others, because nothing (says St. Bernard) conduces more easily to seduction of conscience, than applause, than commendation, than perpetual complaisance, than to be never contradicted, than to be always in no doubt of meeting with approbation. Now this is the deplorable situation of those, whom God, in his wisdom, hath appointed to figure in the great scenes of life. They are more exposed than others by the fatality of their state; because attendance is too often paid them by men whose views are entirely founded in the blindness and ignorance of their masters' consciences; men, who would be mortified, were their masters to be guided by an exact conscience; men, therefore, who make it their duty to draw a veil before the eyes of their masters, whose confidence they have gained, and whom they keep in delusion, what by the counsel they presume to give them, and what by the sentiments they inspire them with.

3rdly. I said more particularly that at court, your abode, a vitiated conscience was still more general, and not to be avoided but with still greater difficulty. And certain I am, that in this yourselves will join issue with me. There the passions feed the strongest impulse; there inclination is the most vehement; there interest hath the greatest prospect; and, there the most enligh-

tened and upright consciences are soonest blinded, and most easily perverted. There the goddess of the world, fortune, exercises over the minds of mankind, and forthwith over their consciences, an absolute dominion. There the hopes of maintaining a place, the impatience to rise higher, the infatuation of growing rich, the fear of displeasing, the desire of being agreeable, form such consciences, as in all other places would pass for monstrous; but being there authorised by long custom, seem to have acquired a right of prescription. People, by having lived at court, and for no other reason but merely by having lived there, are filled with these errors. Whatever uprightness of conscience they may have brought there, by breathing its air, and by hearing its language, they are habituated to iniquity, and their wonted horror of vice is dispelled; vice, which they long blamed, and a thousand times condemned, but which at last beholding with a favourable eye, they permit and excuse: that is, without observing it, they new-mould their consciences, and, by an imperceptible process, from Christians that they were, by little and little become downright worldlings, and not far from heathens.

It would seem as if at court, and in the rest of the world, religious principles were not the same, and that courtiers were entitled to adopt consciences specifically different from those of other men. This is conformable to the general notion; a notion confirmed, or rather justified, by woful experience. It is said every day, when mention is made of a courtier's conscience, that it may as reasonably be diffided in, as his contempt of preferment, and disinterested views. Nevertheless, my brethren, St. Paul assures us, that there is but one God and one faith; and wo be to the man who shall make this one God less an enemy at court to depravity of manners, than in all the world besides; or shall suppose this one faith more indulgent to certain conditions than others. Accursed be he (says the same great apostle) who shall preach a different gospel from that which I have preached! Though an angel from heaven should announce a gospel disagreeing with mine, let the angel be accounted a seducer and impostor. Therefore, dear Christians, accursed is the man, who shall at any time tell you, that you may lawfully act by any other laws of conscience, than those by which God will judge the rest of mankind; and accursed is the man who shall not tell you plainly, that those general laws are the more terrible for you, because your desire of being emancipated from

them is more ardent, and the danger of violating them at court more evident.

You see that the interests and desires of men are the accursed origins from whence arise all the wrong consciences that overspread the world. This made holy David draw that terrible consequence, a consequence from which none of Adam's offspring will ever be excepted: "They have all gone aside." Ps. lv. All have gone astray; and all have walked in the way of delusion and falsehood; all have had corrupt, nay, abominable consciences: "They are corrupted and become abominable in iniquities." Ps. lv. The reason is, that they were all swayed by passion and interest.

O! my God, make us thoroughly sensible of this great truth, and may it be engraven for ever in our minds! As we are blinded by our desires, deliver us not up to the desires of our heart. As we are perverted by interest, permit not that interest to have an ascendant over us. Give us, O Lord, give us upright hearts, which, ruled by reason, shall keep the passions in subjection. Give us generous souls, souls superior to all worldly advantages. Thus our consciences, which are the way that must lead us to a happy end, shall be rectified; and thus shall be accomplished the word of the forerunner of Christ our Saviour, "Make straight the way of the Lord." But as it is easy in this world to adopt, so it is dangerous to be guided by an erroneous conscience, my second position.

Part II. All error is dangerous, particularly in matters regarding ethics; but there is none so prejudicial, or so pernicious in its consequences, as that of conscience, the only rule and principle to direct us in the right discharge of moral duties. Your eye (says our Saviour in the gospel) is the light of your body; if your eye be clear, your body will be enlightened; but if not, your whole body will be involved in darkness: "Take heed, therefore," adds the Saviour of the world, "that the light which is in thee be not darkness." Luke xi. Now the eye of which Christ speaks in this passage, is nothing but conscience, by which we are enlightened, and directed to act. If we be guided by a conscience unmixed with error, it is a light that spreads itself through all our actions, or, in other words, all our actions are actions of light; and, to speak in the language of the great apostle, "They are the fruit of light." Ephes. v. Whatever we do is holy, commendable, and pleasing to God. On the other hand, if our conscience, which is the light

of our soul, should, by the gross errors with which we are possessed, be changed into darkness, all our actions become works of darkness, and the reproach of our Saviour may well be applied to us: "If the light which is in thee be darkness, the darkness itself how great shall it be?" Matt. vi. That is, if that which you call your conscience, and which you really believe to be free from error, is made up of deceit, irregularity, and iniquity, what shall I say of that which your conscience condemns and disallows of, and yourself acknowledge to be irregularity and iniquity.

This, beloved hearers, is the rock we must avoid; for thence proceeds evils the more afflicting and astonishing, as by long custom they neither afflict nor astonish us. Hence it proceeds, that an erroneous conscience induceth us to commit evils of every kind; that it induceth us to commit them boldly and calmly; that it induceth us to commit them without resource, or hope of amendment: a misfortune against which we must carefully guard, unless we choose to expose our souls to an irreparable loss, and everlasting damnation.

No, Christian, there is no kind of evil, of which man is not capable with an erroneous conscience. Tell me the evil it hath not made him commit, and you will comprehend the more easily the truth of my position. To bring it home to your minds: I ask, what lengths will not a presumptuous conscience go? The moment it becomes a conscience, tell me the crimes it doth not excuse? When ambition, for instance, to obtain its ends, found its maxims in conscience, tell me the duties it doth not violate, the sentiments of humanity it doth not stifle, the laws of probity, equity, and fidelity it doth not overturn? Conscience as much as you please, corrupted by ambition, tell me the jealousies it doth not inspire, the detestable intrigues it doth not carry on, the deceits and treacheries, if requisite for its purpose, it doth not put in practice? When conscience acts in concert with the lust of gain, tell me the injustice it doth not allow of, the extortion and usury it doth not connive at, the fraud and simony it doth not palliate, the vexations and chicaneries it doth not justify? When conscience is ruled by animosity and hatred, tell me the resentment and bitterness of heart it doth not authorise, the vindictive contrivances it doth not support, the discord and enmity it doth not foment, the arrogance and obduracy it doth not approve of? No, it is an impetuous torrent which nothing can resist. It covers a multitude

of enormous sins; not, like charity, by effacing, but by tolerating, supporting, and defending them.

The Jews, misled by an erroneous conscience, nailed the Holy of Holies, Jesus Christ our Lord, to an opprobrious cross. Thus men are misguided by false suggestions, and thus were misguided a people who gloried in their having religion. The most horrible and shocking of all crimes, Deicide, they thought a religious duty and a matter of conscience; and upon the same principles are daily committed, without bloodshed, the most cruel homicides. That is, actuated by wrong principles, men cut their neighbour's throat, stab him in the dark, deprive him of his reputation, more dear to him than life, destroy his good name, ruin by ill offices his fortune and credit. Take not offence at the comparison with the Jews; it is but too well founded. They made no difficulty to imbrue their hands in the blood of the JUST ONE, which they eagerly demanded, though scrupulous and superstitious; at the same time, they would not set foot in the house of Pilate, being a Gentile, lest they should suffer contamination, and be made thereby unworthy to participate of the Paschal Lamb. By a similar absurdity, at this day but too common in the world, people swallow a camel, and digest him too, while, ridiculously nice, they strain at a gnat. That is, they give themselves up to the most violent passions, demand satisfaction, take unjust revenge, seize other's property, retain it unlawfully, prey upon the widow and the orphan, rob the poor and the defenceless; and in the mean time upbraid themselves, like the Pharisees, with things of no consequence, as with so many crimes. They are exact and regular to a degree of scrupulosity, in minute ceremonies and external observances, but make light of those things which are most essential and indispensable in religion, namely, justice, mercy, and faith.

What is an erroneous conscience? An abyss, (says St. Bernard,) an unfathomable gulf of grievous sins: "A great sea, wide extended, in which there are reptiles without number." Ps. cviii. Why reptiles? Because as the reptile (says this holy father) insinuates itself smoothly, and creeps on gently; so sin imperceptibly steals into a conscience, through apertures which passion and error have made. And why reptiles without number? Because as the sea, by its prodigious fruitfulness, abounds with reptiles, of which it produces innumerable kinds, and of each kind an infinite number;

so an erroneous conscience is fruitful in sins of every kind; sins that spring from it, and multiply in it.

It is in such a conscience (continues St. Bernard) that envy, hatred, aversions, and ranklings are engendered and quickened. There refined obliquity, insidious calumny, evil designs, and disguised treachery, by an accursed policy, are artfully dissembled. There carnal desires and deliberate consent, which are not perceived; secret, but criminal connexions, the danger of which is not apprehended; growing passions, which soon predominate, being not resisted, are encouraged and cherished. There pride is hidden under the assumed mask of humility; hypocrisy retires beneath the veil of godliness; sensuality, the most dangerous, takes the appearance of politeness. There vices are heaped on vices, because there concentrated, and in their own element. There are reptiles without number. What are we not exposed to, what are we not capable of, by following the dictates of a conscience blinded by sinful habits?

2ndly. This is not all: I add, that by means of a misguided conscience, people run into evil boldly and calmly. Boldly, for they meet with no inward opposition; calmly, for they feel no inward disturbance. A good understanding (according to St. Augustin) is held on such occasions, between the sinner and his conscience; and they at last agree, that, without interrupting the habit of sinning, the sinner shall enjoy tranquillity of mind. Now tranquillity in sin is the greatest of evils. No, Christians; sin, unaccompanied by peace of mind, is not absolutely the evil we should most apprehend: and peace of mind, unaccompanied by sin, is, beyond all doubt, the greatest good we can possibly wish for. But both the one and the other, that is, peace of mind and sin together, are the sovereign evils of the present life, which brings the sinner to the brink of perdition.

This, beloved hearers, is the melancholy effect of an erroneous conscience. Mind, if you please, St. Bernard's remark: it will throw light on this subject. Thus he distinguishes four different sorts of consciences: one, which is good, quiet, and peaceable; another, which is good, but disturbed and uneasy; another which is bad, but in agitation and trouble; another, which is bad, but at ease and undisturbed. And hear how he reasons thereupon: "A good, quiet, peaceable conscience (he observes) is, without dispute, an anticipated paradise; a good conscience, disturbed and uneasy, is

a kind of purgatory in this life, by which Almighty God is sometimes pleased to make trial of the holiest and most godly souls. A bad conscience, in agitation and trouble, proceeding from a view of its own crimes, is a hell upon earth. But there is (adds he) a thing which outgoes this hell upon earth, and that thing is a bad conscience at ease and undisturbed, which is the last stage of an erroneous conscience." For a criminal conscience, but stung with remorse, whatever analogy it may bear to hell, is not at least totally destitute of light, and by consequence there remain in it the principles of compunction, contrition, and conversion. The sinner revolts against the God of heaven, is conscious of his misfortune, and hath a deep sense of the eternal punishment due to his rebellion. His passion overpowers him, and enslaves him to iniquity, but doth not debar him from a knowledge of his duty, and from submitting to truth. A worldling, therefore, though immersed in debauchery, if his conscience be right, and bear a comparative relation to the state of his soul, is not totally gone astray from the fear of God; because he hath still, notwithstanding his extravagance, a just discernment of right and wrong, by which, with the aid of divine grace, he may be disengaged from the latter, and brought over to the former.

But in an erroneous conscience there is nothing but darkness, a thousand times more fatal than eternal darkness, of which mention is made by the Son of God, as from it proceed the obstinacy of the sinner, and his hardness of heart; internal darkness, darkness of conscience, darkness which makes him, in the midst of his irregularities, be satisfied with himself, relying on God's goodness, bear testimony to his own fictitious innocence, with the possession of which he flatters himself, though given over by the Almighty to a reprobate sense, who pronounces a most formidable sentence against him.

3rdly. And this was what I meant, when in the last instance I said, that with an erroneous conscience, people commit evil without resource. For, the great resource of a sinner is, a regular conscience which condemns the sin, and owns it to be such, in the very committing of it. It is thus that God calls us, presses us, forces us, as I may say, to return to our duty, and pay due submission and obedience to his law. It was thus that the grace of our Lord and Saviour gained a complete victory over the heart of Augustin. That uprightness, and as it were that honesty of conscience, which

he preserved in the height of his irregularities, was a healing remedy for those very irregularities. Yes, O Lord, (says he, addressing himself to God, in the "Confession of his Life," a confession which I might propose as a perfect model to all penitent souls;) "yes, O Lord, it was this that saved me, this that drew me out of the deep abyss, the gulf of my iniquities. My conscience sided with you; my conscience, though culpable, yet an equitable judge, made me return to you." Such, dear Christians, was the economy of grace in the conversion of Augustin. That fund of conscience which remained within him, and which sin itself was not able to destroy, was the immediate occasion of all those mercies which it pleased the Almighty to shower down upon him. The disturbance of that conscience, that criminal conscience, yet, notwithstanding its crimes, conformable to the law, was the last grace, but the most efficacious, and the most invincible of all the graces which God had in store, in order to bend and soften his hard and impenitent heart. A comfortable reflection this is for a sinner in the horrors of agitation, and inwardly tormented with corroding anxieties! While the suggestions of my conscience make me feel those cruel but salutary pains, by reproaching me with my sin, I am not abandoned by my bountiful God: his grace operates in me; I have still room to hope; my salvation is in his hands; nor are the mercies of the Lord as yet exhausted. Of this the remorses which tear my heart are a convincing proof, as thereby God shows me the way I am to take in order to return to him.

With a right conscience, how distant soever we may be from God, there is no just reason to despair of reformation. This we learn from daily experience, by which we find, that on a thousand occasions, God is pleased to manifest (as St. Paul expresses it) the treasures of his grace; and that those who have scandalized mankind by their wickedness, give them, by their conversion, the most edifying example. On the contrary, with an erroneous conscience, mortally wounded, there is no possibility of a sinner being cured. Deeply engaged in the greatest crimes, and a long continuance of evil conduct, he is past all hopes of returning to God. Headstrong and hardened, incorrigible and inflexible, as he hath lived in sin, so he dies in sin. Whence it follows, that an erroneous conscience, more especially if at ease, should be looked upon in the order of divine judgment, as a punishment of God, his most dreadful vengeance, and the commencement of reprobation.

Upon this account it was, that the prophet Isaias, animated with zeal for the glory of God and the honour of his cause, and seemingly desirous that the impiety of the Israelites should be punished from above, made use only of this emphatic expression, "Blind the heart of this people." That is, blind the conscience of this people. He did not say, Lord, humble, or confound, or oppress, or overwhelm, or ruin this people. All that would have been but little in comparison with blindness. In this blindness of heart all was comprised. As who should say; it is thus, O Lord, thou shalt be thoroughly avenged. Though war, pestilence, and famine, should lay waste the land, and temporal disasters of every kind should befall these ungrateful and unruly souls, they would be punished only by halves. But let their consciences be involved in the darkness of ignorance, and the measure of thy wrath, as of their iniquity, will be filled up. Thus he conceived that blindness of conscience was the greatest and most horrible punishment of sin.

But on that very account, and in a spirit quite contrary to that of Isaias, I prefer a prayer, and address myself to God: Ah! Lord, how incensed soever you may be against them, blind not the hearts of these people; blind not the consciences of those who hear me, whom I have not yet the misfortune to serve with reluctance, a reluctance arising from the ill use which they made of your divine word and my ministration. Pour forth your wrath on whatever else you please, but spare their consciences. Their goods and fortunes are at your disposal, but do not deprive them of the light that should direct them in the path of virtue. Let them be humbled, mortified, impoverished, debased, according to the notions of worldly men; but dispel not the ray that should direct their steps. To whatever punishment you are pleased to inflict, they are ready to submit, except the depriving them of a due knowledge and sight of their duty. This would be to ruin them, and to ruin them for ever, and to condemn them in this life to eternal reprobation.

Thus I have proved, that it is easy to adopt an erroneous conscience, and that it is dangerous and pernicious to follow its dictates. It remains that I show, in the third and last part, how unavailing it will be in the presence of God, to allege in our justification an error in conscience.

PART. III. It must be allowed, Christians, that God, who is merciful as well as just, would not impute to us our errors as crimes, were they a voluntary offspring of a candid mind; and the

sinner might avail himself of his wrong conscience with reason, alleging it as a lawful excuse to God for his sin, if it admitted of the characteristic I am now speaking of, namely, candour. But the question is asked, whether this be always, or often the case? This interrogatory is of the utmost consequence, being an important rule, whereon depends, in the occurrences of life, the nice discernment and exact judgment, with which it is incumbent on all mankind to scrutinize their actions. We are, therefore, to find out, whether candour be a characteristic generally applicable to the erroneous consciences of the sinners of the age, so that an erroneous conscience may be a colour or title to exculpate or justify them in the presence of God. Ah! beloved hearers, I would it were so! A thousand sins would cease to be sins, and the world would be disburdened without grace or penance, of an infinity of crimes, which virtuous souls have deplored in all ages, and still deplore.

But if that were the case, (replies St. Bernard,) why did David, that religious king, in the fervour of contrition, beg of Almighty God, as a special favour, that he would forget his ignorances; thereby intimating what it was that gave rise to the disorder of his conscience? "The sins of my youth, and my ignorances do not remember." Ps. xxiv. Would he not, on the contrary have said: O Lord, call to mind my past ignorances, and forget them not? For, as it is by them I am to be justified in your divine sight, it is much for my interest that you never lose the remembrance of them, and that they be uninterruptedly before your eyes. Did he speak in this manner? No; he said, forget them: blot them out of that excessively dreadful book, which you will produce against me when you shall judge me in the extent and rigour of your justice. Think not of the evil I have done unknowingly, because not to have known it, is itself a crime deserving of punishment: "And my ignorances do not remember." It is not, therefore, true, that ignorance, and by consequence, a wrong conscience, is on all occasions an allowable excuse for acting contrary to the divine commands.

Further: I maintain that it seldom is, and that in the present age it is a frivolous pretext, for these two cogent and unanswerable reasons; because we live in too enlightened an age to suppose a conscience at once in error and invincible ignorance; and because it is in the power of God, at this present time, to refute the errors of one conscience by the rectitude of another, which is within us,

or which, though not within us, riseth up against us in our own despite. Spare me your attention a moment longer, and you shall thoroughly be convinced of the truth of my assertion.

1st. No, Christians, in an age so enlightened as that in which God hath given us existence, we must not presume, that among mankind, there are many consciences both erroneous and innocent. Few there are in that predicament, and in this audience, I am bold enough to say, there is not one. For if you that had been faithful to the light of grace, which Almighty God abundantly communicated to you, and if you had made use of the means by which he enabled you to acquire a knowledge of your duty, the errors productive of so many trespasses would never have blinded you, or perverted your conscience. I will, with your leave, descend to particulars. For instance, if, before you entered upon action, or came to a decision on essential points, you had diffided in yourself; if you had calmly consulted a man of good sense and a virtuous Christian, who would have disclosed his mind to you without disguise; if you had given unrestrained access to those, from whose capacity and experience you might have learned the truth; if you had cultivated the acquaintance of such persons as wanted neither the will nor the power to suggest the best measures; if the peculiarity of your temper, or repugnance to hear them, had not stopped the mouths of your ablest friends; if fawning sycophants had not by these means got possession of your mind; if among God's ministers, who are the interpreters of his law, you had recourse to those whom he had provided, the most liberally, with the gift of knowledge, and were known to be so; if you had sought skilful, not indulgent directors; if you had not, in the very tribunal of penance, preferred what was convenient to what was salutary, the erroneous conscience we are now examining would never have taken place. It took place, therefore, because you resisted the graces and lights which God afforded you. It took place, because you spent your days in extreme indolence, with regard to your obligations; because the least of your concern was to be rightly instructed; because, hurried away by pleasure, or taken up with the enjoyment of worldly amusements, or voluntarily and unnecessarily overpowered with a thousand temporal affairs, you were not at the pains of being thoroughly grounded in the principles of your religion; because, being fond of internal peace and tranquillity of mind, you were unwilling to dive

into that which would evidently, but profitably, have disturbed it. It took place, because you always, in doubtful cases, appealed to your own, and no other judgment; because in process of time you contracted a habit of indulging your presumption, and believed you surpassed, in penetration and discernment, the rest of mankind; because you always assumed the liberty of acting according to your own notion of things, rejecting wise counsel, impatient of contradiction, glorying in your perversity, and, as the scripture speaks, unwilling to hear or to know anything, lest you should be obliged to take up with the practice of Christian duties for the rest of your life: "He would not understand that he might do well." Ps. iii.

Borne away in this manner by the current of the world, you adjusted your conscience to your will and pleasure, and fell at last, careless, into a woful blindness. Now are you not unjust, the most unjust of men, if you expect that a conscience, founded on such principles, will render you excusable before the God of justice? Such allegations might well become pagans, enveloped in the darkness of superstition and infidelity. They might, perhaps, become those whose minds are uncultivated, and who, by their situation, are destitute of education, and proper instruction. But you, Christians, who pretend to be endowed with understanding and discernment in an uncommon degree; you, whom the light, if I may venture the expression, environs on all sides; you, who have so many and such good opportunities of investigating the truth, and of knowing it to the bottom: what right have you to say that you were beguiled by an error in conscience? Of this mistake, this empty excuse, the only effect is, to make you more criminal. It is a cloak for your wickedness, which, when you make use of, you enhance the crime by ascribing to God that which with shame you should impute to yourselves.

2ndly. We are the more liable to have sentence of condemnation pronounced against us at God's tribunal, as he will judge us not only by the errors of our consciences considered absolutely, but of our consciences compared with the consciences of the pagans; compared with our nicety, and even with our severity, in regard to others; compared with our notions antecedent to sin, of good and evil. These (says St. Augustin) are so many rules which we ought to have followed, with a view to regulate, or at least to retrieve, a conscience unspotted and duly informed; which having

been neglected, will be so many efficients of our condemnation. Happy should I be, should I persuade you, this day, to turn them to advantage!

God will make use of the consciences of the pagans to condemn those of Christians. Thus Tertullian put some Christian women, whom he instructed, to the blush; women actuated by the spirit of the world, who made no scruple of a certain unguarded, unbecoming demeanor. In particular he upbraided them with the indecency of their attire, artfully negligent, and incompatible with modesty. Is it not a shame (says he) that there should be pagans in the world more delicate than you are on this head? Is it not a shame, that the Arabian women, with whose manners and customs you are well acquainted, far from being addicted to such indecencies, have always detested them as a kind of prostitution; and that you, fostered in the bosom of the Christian religion, should pretend to justify them by a corrupt practice, of which the world avails itself to no purpose, as it is held in abhorrence and stigmatized by God? And let it be remembered (he adds) that you will be judged before God by these very pagans. And I say, pursuing the same thought, is it not very strange, and no less deplorable, that we should allow ourselves liberties with impunity, and without remorse, in a thousand particulars, which the pagans themselves considered as criminal? That in point of justice, we blush not at artifices, subterfuges, and chicanaries, which the court of Areopagus would have disallowed? That we should put our money at disproportionate interest, amounting to usury, a practice condemned by all the Roman laws? That we should qualify with the epithet of decent, or at least of lawful, public diversions, spectacles, and exhibitions, which (according to St. Augustin) rendered those infamous who represented them? Whence arose these rigid sentiments, and this severity of the law? From a natural rectitude of conscience; and it is this right conscience of the pagans that will condemn ours. For, it is an article of faith, that they will rise up against us at the general judgment; and certain it is, that this very comparison between them and us, will be one of the most galling reproaches of our blindness.

But to keep closer to the point in hand: our conscience is blind in our regard, and clear-sighted in regard to others; indulgent to ourselves to a degree of remissness, and exact upon others to a degree of severity. What then will God do? In order to con-

demn the one by the other, these two consciences he will confront. For, it is written, that we shall be judged as we shall have judged others, and that God will show us favour as we shall have shown it to others.

In fine, Almighty God will recall to our minds those former notions, so just and so holy, which, before it blinded us, we entertain of sin. Whatever revolutions may have happened in our conscience, we have not yet forgotten that happy condition, in which our innocence and the justness of our reason, disengaged us from the errors and delusions of the world. We still recollect those primary ideas, by which we judged with such propriety of things relating to the divine law. The sin we now look upon as a very trifle, appeared to us, once, as a very monster; and it was conscience inspired us with that sentiment.

This mischief, therefore, of an erroneous conscience, I conjure you, beloved hearers, to beware of, or redress. In order thereto, you should never lose sight of these two maxims, these eternal truths, which on all occasions should regulate your conduct: one, that the way to heaven is narrow; the other, that a narrow way bears no proportion to a wide conscience The latter is self-evident, and the former is founded on the words of Jesus Christ: "Narrow is the way that leadeth unto life." Matt. vii. This, if you are Christians ever so little, will be a sufficient inducement to resolve on a solid and perfect conversion. Remember that you have the power of regulating your consciences in the manner you please; but that you have not the power of widening the way which leads to life. The way of God is not to be adapted to your consciences, but your consciences to the way of God. Now this cannot be, while they are influenced by the maxims and customs of the times. In order to attain the degree of proportion without which they are exposed to certain reprobation, they must necessarily be restrained either by a reasonable fear, or a punctual obedience. If in proportion to the latitude you took in the observance of your duty, the narrow way to heaven grew wider and wider, alas! brother, (cries the pious St. Bernard,) far from deterring you from living so freely, I should in some shape myself encourage you to it. Well and good, would I say: as you have found out a way equally secure, and not so difficult, that leads to salvation, proceed in it resolutely, you have a right to do so without controul. But the case is otherwise. The inspired writings make no mention of a

wide way that leads to heaven. There is but one gate: and to enter by that, the apostle informs us, it is requisite we make a generous effort; which if we do, we shall be well rewarded with the glory that is promised us.

SERMON XV.

ON TRUE AND FALSE PIETY.

For the Fifth Sunday after Pentecost.

"*Verily I say unto you: Unless your righteousness shall exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.*" MATT. v. 20.

THIS is the idea, beloved Christians, and a noble one it is, which Jesus Christ gives us of the gospel law, and of the perfection it includes. You know what the Pharisees were among the Jews; men of a solitary and retired life, sequestered from the multitude, and holding no communication with the people; men looked upon as saints, equally respected by the vulgar and the great, and whose exemplary life was at once the admiration and edification of the public. But (who could have believed it?) Jesus Christ, notwithstanding all this holiness, declares to us in the gospel, nay, assures us with an oath: "Verily I say unto you," that if our piety surpass not that of the devotionalists of the synagogue, we shall never be received into the kingdom of heaven; that the greatest virtue to which they seemed raised, is not sufficient for the first degree of perfection in a Christian; and that to stop there, were not to fulfil the duty of our state, or answer the end of our vocation. Such a declaration of our blessed Saviour ought, it should seem, to discourage us, and throw us into a secret desponency. But this was not what the Saviour of the world had in view. If he makes decrees, it is not for our destruction, but for our instruction; if he speaks, he speaks as a master, not as a judge: and if he places the example of the Pharisees before us, it is only to let us see what

disorders may corrupt the most apparent devotion, and teach us to avoid them. It is, indeed, a subject of infinite importance; and of all those which I have treated in this pulpit, or shall treat hereafter, it is perhaps one of the most useful. To serve God is the end of our existence. Our salvation is annexed to the service of God; and thereon depends our eternal happiness or eternal wo. But in the service of God there are rocks to be feared; and therefore, how important must it be for us to have a thorough knowledge of them, in order to guard against them.

The most brilliant gold is not always the most pure; and the most shining piety is not always the most solid, or the most perfect. Of this assertion can we desire a more authentic and clear proof, than to instance in the Pharisees and teachers of the law? Their works, the most holy to all appearance, were not only unprofitable in the presence of God, but expressly condemned by him. This appears evidently from three irregularities, which I purpose to encounter in the three divisions of this discourse. And truly, what was this Pharisaical piety? A hypocritical, false, and vicious piety; first, in its *subject*, secondly, in its *end*, thirdly, in its *form*. Be pleased to take notice. Vicious in its subject, because it affected a scrupulous regularity as to small observances, while it shamefully neglected the most essential duties. Vicious in its end, because it had no object in view but its own advantages and worldly interests. In fine, vicious in its form, because it was external, and consisted totally in a certain outside. Upon this account it was, that the Son of God attacked them so openly, and blasted them so often with his maledictions. But would we, my brethren, make sure of our salvation, by a true and sincere piety before God, and render ourselves agreeable in his divine sight, let us correct in ourselves these three failings. That is, let our piety be entire, disinterested, and internal. Entire, taking in whatever concerns the service of God; and above all, not to prefer the counsels to the precepts. Disinterested, seeking only God and his kingdom, without any regard to what we might have otherwise reason to hope for with respect to the world, and the things of the world. Internal, residing in the heart, and issuing from the heart. If, by these three characteristic marks, we do not raise ourselves above the Pharisees, if we give not a more extensive range to our piety, if we propose not to it a more noble end, if it take not its rise in the secret recesses and bottom of our hearts, we must not flatter ourselves that it will

ever make us find grace and favour in the presence of God: "Unless our righteousness shall exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees, we shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." Of this it is my purpose to convince you in order; and to this I request you would hearken attentively.

PART I. That there should be a piety, beloved Christians, the fault of which should consist in taking too great latitudes in small matters, while invariably fixed to the point of rectitude in matters of consequence, is not surprising. It is owing to our frailty; and this frailty is so natural, that it is, one would think, in some measure excusable. But that there should be a pretended piety, the character of which should be, to be exact to a degree of scrupulosity, in the slightest practices, and to neglect the most important points of the law, is the most gross of all mistakes, and may be looked upon as folly, and a perversion of the mind. For what purpose can this zeal for the observance of the counsels simply, answer, if at the same time, we abandon and violate the most express commandments? By fulfilling the precepts, though I neglect the counsels, I show God a fidelity for which he will reward me; because, after all, I do what he requires, and I obey him in that which he commands. But by submitting to the counsels, without obeying the precepts, I labour to no purpose, nay, become culpable in the eyes of God, as under the colour of an imaginary perfection, I transgress his adorable will, and overlook my most strict obligations.

This, however, beloved Christians, is one of the most usual inordinations in the world; and it is the visible and insupportable abuse which the Son of God condemned in the Pharisees, and which is but too common among us. Consider what it was in these sages of the Jewish religion, and thereby correct it in your own persons. For, "wo unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites," (Matt. xxiii.,) says the Saviour of men. Your whole piety amounts to no more than the observance of certain ceremonies and customs, and paying certain tithes, of which the law makes no mention, and to comply with which it is not absolutely incumbent on you; and nevertheless, you forget your capital duties: "Ye pay tithe of mint, and of anise, and of cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, justice, mercy, and faith." Matt. xxiii. The law commands you to be equitable in your judgments, and you commit, every day, the most crying injustices. The law recommends you to be faithful in society and the intercourse of life, and you are full

of artifice and dissimulation. The law requires that you be mild and patient, and charitable to your neighbour; and, through an extravagant rigorousness, you are hard upon weak persons, destiture of fellow-feeling, and unable to compassionate human infirmities. "Blind guides! ye strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel." Matt. xxiii. Thus, I say, the Son of God bespoke them; and this, in fact, was the vice of the Pharisees. If the observance of the sabbath-day was the point in question, they were exact to superstition; but on that same day they plotted against our Saviour, and took measures to destroy him. They objected to the apostles, as though it were a crime, that they did not wash their hands before meals; but at the same time they made light of the most inviolable and sacred law of nature, which is to honour our parents; for they taught children to despise them, to behave ungratefully to them, and not to afford them the necessary assistance. When they were to have appeared in the judgment-hall of Pilate, in which a God-man, the deliverer of Israel, and the Holy of Holies, against whom they had declared, was to have been interrogated, and have judgment passed on him, they refused to go in, because that day was the eve of the Passover, on which the Jews were not allowed to approach a pagan, without contracting a kind of contamination, which made them unfit to eat the Paschal Lamb: "And they themselves went not into the judgment-hall, lest they should be defiled." John xviii. Very delicate consciences indeed! They feared lest the house of Pilate should infect them, and they did not fear being stained by a most atrocious and sacrilegious deed. They durst not show themselves before a foreign judge; but they had the boldness to prosecute and oppress an innocent person, to suborn and bring false witnesses against him, to spill his blood, and make him die on a cross.

Now, Christians, is there not a striking likeness between this piety and that of these times? For we must not look upon this Pharisaical devotion as a phantom, which the law of Jesus hath reduced to nought. It still subsists, and subsists in the very centre of Christianity, in the bosom of the church. To be persuaded of it, you need only give a little attention to what passes all around you every day. A man hath his fixed times for prayer, for reading good books, and for going to the sacraments. It is a track of life which he hath marked out for himself, or which his director hath marked out for him. And upon this he is bent to such a degree,

that all the business in the world could not induce him to omit one point of that which hath been prescribed to him, or of that which he hath prescribed to himself. But hear him in conversation: he holds the most satirical and defamatory discourses: in a devout accent he condemns one, and discloses whatever is most sacred in the conduct of another; he spares nobody; and, as though he were deputed by heaven for the general reformation of manners, he arraigns all mankind with impunity. But see him engaged in an affair in which he thinks himself offended; there is no satisfaction which he doth not demand, and perhaps no reparation can satisfy him. His own cause, he thinks the cause of God, or at least you will never be able to make him think himself in any degree in the wrong, and that justice is not entirely on his side. Of these specious principles he avails himself to foment in his heart the most lively resentment, and to justify in practice the most unrighteous vengeance.

A woman is first in the list of saints, she hath the use of meditation, and aspires to prayer the most sublime. She would not forgive herself to have deviated once from a certain line of life which she follows, and which she hath made an invariable rule. Do but oppose her, however, on some occasion, and you will find her haughty, disdainful, impatient, highly prizing herself for the regularity of her life, and the strictness of her virtue, to enjoy the liberty of doing what she pleases, and as she pleases. Examine the whole of her domestic economy, and how she behaves to all the family; she is neither complaisant to her husband, nor affectionate to her children, nor watchful over her servants. Every one must suffer for her whims, and be plagued with the vicissitudes of her humour. Provided she have past a part of the day before the altar, and assisted at certain devotional ceremonies, though the business of the house were neglected and in disorder, she would scarce be at pains to remedy the evil.

What might I not say of every other state, were I inclined to protract this detail? Is there one that would not furnish me with innumerable instances of this frivolous, capricious, ill-judged piety? Is it not true, that the very ministers of the Lord, whose duty it is to give good example, and lead the people in the way of God, fall sometimes unaccountably into these inordinate and evil practices? How many of them have we seen exert a most ardent zeal to maintain or re-establish the fallen discipline of the church; and

notwithstanding all this, divide, in some measure, the church herself, by fomenting factions, and occasioning revolts among her members! And as such is the case, beloved hearers, what have I to do, but to resume the curse which our Saviour uttered, and to say after him: "Wo be to you, not only to you, Scribes and Pharisees, but to you, Christians, unworthy of the sacred name you bear, and of the religion you profess? Wo, not only to you who lead a life of open and declared libertinism, and give yourselves up to all the depravity of the world, but to you likewise who would gladly persuade yourselves that you belong to God, and are addicted to his service, and accordingly would raise the superstructure of piety to the highest degree, and neglect at the same time the foundation."

For, which are the foundations of Christian sanctity, such as our Saviour himself hath represented it? The example of the young man in the gospel shows it evidently. He found himself moved by an impulse of God; he was desirous of labouring for his sanctification and salvation; and, accordingly, he came to receive advice from the divine Master, to whom, in order to hear eternal truths from his mouth, people flocked on all sides. Now what did the Son of God say to him? Did he speak to him of an absolute disengagement from all he was worth in the world? Did he explain to him the mystical operations of grace? Did he converse with him on the sublime and particular gifts of an extraordinary prayer? No, beloved hearers; but "keep the commandments," replied this God-man. This is that which you have to do, preferably to all other things. If you build not thereupon, the whole edifice of your perfection being raised upon sand, will fall to destruction of itself, and overwhelm you in its ruins.

Here, then, I may apply with great propriety, that which the great apostle said: "Although I should speak all the languages of the world, and even the language of angels; although I should have the gift of prophecy, and were instructed in the mysteries of God, so that nothing should escape the extent of my knowledge; although I should work miracles so as to transport mountains, should lay out every farthing I am worth in relieving the necessities of the poor, should offer myself for martyrdom, and deliver up my body to the most cruel torments; if I have not the charity of God, (and how should I have it, if I neglect to do that which is required by the law of God?) if, I say, I have not this divine charity, I am nothing, nor at most, I am nothing but sounding brass, or a tink-

ling cymbal." Moreover, as the same teacher of the Gentiles, among the characteristic marks of charity, the sublime excellence of which he minutely and punctiliously displays, shows us that it is patient, meek, and benificent; that it is subject neither to jealousy, nor anger, nor violence of any kind; that it harbours no evil opinion of another; that it loves not injustice, and rejoices not therein; in short, that it endures everything, and goes through everything: it follows, that if I keep not within the bounds of moderation, on certain occasions, and possess not, according to the gospel phrase, my soul in patience; that if I am destitute of the meekness requisite to keep up peace in the family and in the neighbourhood; that if, far from being inclined to behave obligingly, and give content to all the world, I secretly indulge envy against one, and break out into open disagreement with another; that if I too easily admit suspicions and prejudices disadvantageous to persons with whom I am to spend my days, or who are subject to my obedience; that if I look upon as just whatever a blind zeal inspires me withal, and endeavour to give my brother uneasiness; that if I humble him, and his sorrows, with which I ought to sympathize, are to me a matter of complacency, I may multiply and accumulate penitential deeds, and add prayer to prayer as long as I please, my whole piety vanishes like smoke, and is of no weight in the presence of God.

And for that reason, beloved hearers, what have we not room to say and to think of those pious women, or of those at least who think themselves such, but who, without any regard to the engagement of lawful matrimony, and the sacred tie by which they are bound, persist with a calm mind in divorces, which they try to justify by specious pretexts, but which an equitable and discerning public condemns? What might we not say and think of so many others on other subjects, which I pass over in silence, and which, unfortunately, are but too well known? What, in reality, do people say and think of them? The question is asked, how such and such a thing, of which these ladies make no scruple, can accord with devotion? No one comprehends it; and without doubt it is very hard, nay, impossible to comprehend it. Nevertheless, they go on with their devotions, apply, continually, all their thoughts to them, and bestow all their solicitude on them; and if they accuse themselves of what leans heavily on their conscience, it is only some negligences in these devotions, and some frailties, which appear as crimes of uncommon magnitude.

How then! Are not these devotions good? Ought they to be neglected? There, Christians, lies our infatuation, ever to run into extremes, which are always vicious, and never to steer a middle course, which is the criterion of real virtue. To limit one's piety to certain points of supererogation and mere devotion, which are only the completement of the law, while the ground-work is overlooked, is an excess of which the sole exposition I have given of it, is sufficient to let you see the irregularity; but so to confine one's self to the ground-work and obligation of the law, as never to make farther progress, and give up all the practices of a Christian fervour, is an excess in the other extreme, injurious to God and to his grace, pernicious to ourselves, and very dangerous in its consequences. Injurious to God, with whom we keep on the reserve, although he treats us with such liberality; injurious to the grace of God, which we hold in close captivity, although it is essentially in its free action; pernicious to ourselves, in that thereby we lose an immense store of merits and celestial treasures, which we might and ought to lay up in the present life, and which we should find in the next; finally, very dangerous in its consequences, since, from negligence in the smallest matters, there is a speedy passage to negligence in matters of the greatest moment. What then is perfection, and, of course, piety? It is an assemblage both of the one and the other; a fulness of fidelity that unites the whole, precept and counsel; precept through duty, and caused through love; precept, because it is the order of God; and counsel, because it is the will of God. For this is the example which Jesus Christ himself, our Saviour and our model, hath given us, when, presenting himself to the baptism of John, he said to that divine precursor, who, in the sudden perplexity into which he was thrown by the humility of his Master, refused to baptize him: make no opposition to what I do, "for so it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." Matt. iii. This is what the Saviour of the world proposed again to us in his person, for our instruction and imitation, when he told the Jews, that he was "not come to abolish the law, but to fulfil it;" (Matt. v.;) and presently afterwards, explaining what it was to fulfil the law, he declared, that "not an iota or tittle should pass from it in any wise, until all was fulfilled." Matt. iii. This is the excellent rule he hath given us in few words, which, how short soever, is in some sort an epitome of a Christian's whole conduct: do this, and neglect not that.

Do this, which you are commanded to do, and neglect not that, which you are exhorted to do. As you are commanded to do the one, you should do it before all things; and as you are exhorted to do the other, you should not neglect it, but a holy zeal to please Almighty God, and promote your own progress in the way of God, should induce you to it: "These things you must do, nor must those be left undone." Matt. xiii. Wherefore, were a choice to be made of one before the other, the former would incontestably require the preference. But one may perfectly coincide with the other; and this wonderful coincidence is owing to true piety. A piety, entire in its subject, and disinterested in its end. A fresh advantage, by which it is distinguished from the piety of the Pharisees, as we shall now see in the second part.

PART II. Of all the passions, there is not one more generally diffused through the human heart, than self-interest; and I may even add, that it is a universal passion, which is intermixed with all the others, and which makes them act by its movement and impression. In reality, self-interest, such as I understand it, is neither more or less than self-love; and who is ignorant what great lengths self-love will go, and how artfully it insinuates itself into all places, and on all occasions? What doth the revengeful man intend by harrassing his enemy with malignity and warmth, and by trying to ruin him? He would satisfy his resentment; and this satisfaction which he procures, is what I denominate his own interest. The same may be said of the libertine, the voluptuary, the drunkard, and others. But, beloved Christians, what cannot sufficiently be deplored is, that piety itself hath not escaped the baneful influence of self-interest, which spoils and corrupts everything the most pure and holy in religion.

Such was the ruling passion of the Pharisees; and, according to what the evangelists have reported, their religion and good works arose from two principal motives. They wanted to be honoured; and notwithstanding the austerity they affected externally, they wanted to be abundantly provided with everything conducive to the conveniencies and comforts of life. The specious and the profitable, an easy situation, and an absolute dominion over the minds of men, were what they aspired to. And to that intent, what was their wont? Whatever the good and the virtuous are accustomed to do from principles of true piety. They led a retired life; they spent whole days, nay, whole nights, in the

temple; they employed almost all their time in singing the praises of the Lord before his altar, or in conversing with him in protracted prayer; they breathed, it would seem, nothing but penance and mortification; they talked of nothing but fasting and abstaining; they found fault with everything, and incessantly bewailed the depravation of manners, and the corruption of the age. And what was the consequence? What hath happened but too often in succeeding times. The people, too credulous, and easily misled by outward appearance, conceived a very high veneration for them. Great numbers of pious women, with a good intention indeed, but yet according to the ordinary weakness of their sex, judging of devotion by I know not what apparent severity, and conceiving prejudices, as hard to be rooted out of a well meaning soul, as they are easy to be fixed in it, declared in their favour, sided with them, put themselves under their direction, entrusted them equally with the management of their incomes and the salvation of their souls, enriched them with their fortunes, impoverished themselves for their convenience, and thought they made a noble sacrifice to God, by making contributions, in order to preserve in his divine service men so elevated, so holy, and so perfect: for, this is the account which the gospel gives of them.

But this is not all. From this general prepossession in their favour, sprung another effect not less advantageous, nor less conformable to the ambitious views of those false devotionalists replete with pride. For by that means they acquired a credit that gave them power over everything. They governed families, and gave directions in houses. Disputes were terminated by their decision. The most profound respect and all sorts of honour were paid them in the synagogue and public places. All this soothed their vanity; and of this they were jealous to a great degree. And what was the origin of all this? The notion that people conceived of their piety. This (says our Saviour) is the fruit of your prayers, those venal prayers, which you repeat so often, and continue so long. These are the means, as we read in St. Mark, by which they became so powerful and rich: "For a pretence make long prayers." Mark xii.

Now of all kinds of false piety, I hold that there is not one more base, than this mercenary, selfish kind. It is equally criminal in the presence of God, who searches every the most hidden recess of the human heart, and odious before men, when they find it out, and

are able to remove the veil that covers it. Hearken to this, I beseech you. I say, a kind of false piety, the most criminal and abominable in the presence of God. For (says St. Chrysostom) what a profanation, and what a sacrilege, to abuse in this manner, I do not say holy things, but holiness itself! Should we seize and carry off the vessels consecrated to the use of the altar, as did heretofore the king of Babylon, and defile and profane them, it were a deed deserving of the most rigorous chastisement, because they are sacred. But, after all, what is the holiness of those vessels, in comparison with the holiness which is in us, or at least which ought to be in us? Those vessels, in strict propriety, are not holy; or at least they have only, if I may be allowed to express myself, a metaphorical holiness, a holiness of analogy and relation; but that which is in us is the very form that sanctifies us, the very unction of divine grace, the source and origin of every other holiness. Judge, therefore, (says St. Chrysostom,) how great must be your crime in the eyes of God, when you corrupt this holiness, with a view to gratify some passion; when you make it subservient either to your avarice, or to your ambition; when you try to form a most monstrous complex, by using your endeavours to make piety coalesce with irregular desires; piety, that is, which is most pure and precious, and irregular desires, which of themselves are gross and terrestrial.

Accordingly, Salvian knew not a more formal contempt of God than that which we are speaking of; and this opinion he hath delivered in clear and express terms. To serve the world (says this great bishop) for God, is a virtue; to serve the world for the world, is vice. What then must it be to serve God for the world? How can we do the supreme Being a more glaring injury? Now such is the horrid outrage he receives from a selfish piety. For then our interest is the end we propose, and we consider God as a means only to obtain this end. And because the end is not subservient to the means, but the means to the end, so far are we from serving God in this disposition, that we would have him serve us: we would have him be aiding and instrumental in satisfying our irregular desires, our delicacy, our vanity, our pride, according to the just complaint which he made by the mouth of his prophet: "Thou hast made me to serve in thy sins." Isai. xliii.

For this reason, false piety is not only criminal in the sight of God, but hateful to men. They hate it so soon as ever they per-

ceive it, and wherever they perceive it. Nor is this surprising, since nothing is more dangerous, or more to be dreaded, than self-interest blended with devotion, or devotion influenced by self-interest. A devotee of this sort, (allow me the expression,) a self-interested devotee, is capable of everything. Mind the words "every thing." In the first place, because he gives everything, sometimes the most iniquitous, an appearance of piety, which deceives himself, and of which he would not be undeceived. But, in the second place, capable of everything, because whatever intention passion may suggest to him, his piety, or rather the self-esteem in which this ostentatious piety confirms him, puts it in his power to obtain his end, and secures him success. Would he take revenge, there is no opposition. Would he supplant a rival, he is all-powerful. Would he blast his neighbour's fame and reputation, he puts him down. His sole testimony were sufficient to condemn innocence itself. And is it not—(I shall say it, not with a view of bringing true piety into disesteem, God forbid! but to condemn the abuses which may creep into it, and which have crept into it at all times,) is it not by means of false piety that men of mean understandings have been raised to high dignities, and that the most unworthy of consideration and recommendation have been the most recommended and the most considered, and, without any claim or merit than assuming a certain air of reformation, have left more deserving competitors behind, and got possession of the first places? Now, I ask, is there anything to judge by our feelings, more capable to raise our aversion and indignation?

Let us not dissemble the matter, my brethren, it is this self-interest which hath been in all ages the greatest scandal of devotion, and which, if I may use the expression, hath villified it in the world. This is what hath opened the mouths of dissenters from the Catholic faith, and hath made them declaim so eloquently against us. The abuse they remarked in the soundest part of the Christian people; that they would not consecrate themselves to the church, but from interested motives to get an honourable settlement, to be invested with a dignity and appear in it with splendor, to take possession, as the prophet speaks, of the sanctuary of God; and that they only consider the good of their families, and esteemed employments and livings in proportion to the revenues and profits arising from them: the covetousness they discovered in some ecclesiastics, who ardently wish to reap temporal advantages in the

spiritual field, and would not take part in the sacred ministry, or apply their care to it, but according to the measure of emoluments they expected to draw from it: the restless zeal and extreme vivacity they observed in others, to make good their right, setting up for sovereigns, and seeking to glut themselves with certain honours, under the specious colour of feeding their flocks: the emulation they perceived between one body of men and another, to bring into vogue certain devotions that were useful to them. All these, beloved Christians, are topics on which the enemies of the church have very liberally thrown out their censures, and exerted their abilities.

And even at this day, what notion have worldly people of piety? What do they think of it? How do they speak of it? Full of the prejudices which so many proofs have established in the world, as incontestable principles, against the partizans of devotion, they persuade themselves that all devout persons have their ends in view: that one tries to gain the favour of the great, that another seeks help and protection of which he stands in need; that one endeavours to be a spiritual director, that another hath attachments still more criminal. Thus they talk, and you know how contemptuously. Insomuch that what ought to be an occasion of praise, is unfortunately become a cause of reproach; and that the epithet devout, which, whether applied to man or woman, in its own signification, expresses that which is most respectable in the Christian religion, carries with it now-a-days a cloud that eclipses its whole splendor.

Upon this account it was, that the Son of God commissioning his apostles to preach the gospel, insisted that they should do it with as much disinterestedness, as spirit and resolution. Insomuch that he would not allow them to possess a second garment, and forbad them the enjoyment of any property for their subsistence. Upon this account it was, that he recommended to them, in such strong terms, to seek neither honours, nor dignities, nor precedence, even in his kingdom, which is the church, giving them to understand, that their greatest elevation should consist in lowliness, and that "the greatest among them should be as the least." Luke xxii. Upon this account it was, that the apostles, following the divine instructions of that adorable Master, took such great care, in the exercise of their ministry, to banish from their persons the slightest suspicion of private interest, convinced that they

could not otherwise contribute to the good of souls, and that the moment people should discover private interest in their apostolical functions, they would lose all belief in the doctrine they preached, and would refuse to hear them. Upon this account it was, that St. Paul, in particular, instructing the Corinthians, made them notice this characteristic of disinterestedness, which disengaged him from all human views in the labours of his apostleship. Alas! my brethren, (says he,) consider our conduct and situation, and judge if it be a secret thirst of applause, or the vain hope of a temporal fortune, with which we are affected. We announce the faith to you, and, according to the faith, we are your fathers in Jesus Christ; but, according to the world, we are the outcasts of men. Christians as you are, you enjoy places, aspire to preferment, and are distinguished in the world by your rank and fortune; but as for us, we are nothing: "We are weak, but ye are strong." 1 Cor. iv. Your nobility procures you honour and respect, but we are confounded with the dregs of the people: "Ye are honourable, but we are despised." 1 Cor. iv. What have we gained to this very time? And, so far as it regards the present life, what have we procured by all our toil? You know how it is, and may bear witness to it: "Even unto this hour, we hunger, and thirst, and are naked." 1 Cor. iv. We are covered with disgrace, punished with stripes, sent into banishment, and obliged, like vagrants, to wander far and near: "We are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place." 1 Cor. iv. In a word, we are treated as the refuse of men, the scum of the earth, the filth of the world, and the offscouring of all things unto this day." 1 Cor. iv. If, however, (concludes the apostle, I say these things, it is not in the view of reproaching you with them, or putting you to confusion, but to show you that whilst we labour among you, we labour for your good, and seek nothing by our labours but your good.

Thus spoke the great teacher of the Gentiles, and who can tell what impression so perfect a disengagement from the things of this world made on the minds of men? Let us, beloved Christians, have the same disengagement; the world will acknowledge it, will respect it, will blazon it forth as derived from the Father of lights. But setting aside the judgments of the world, it is this that will sanctify us in the presence of God. Then shall our prayers ascend to his throne like a pleasing odour. He will receive

our incense, because uncorrupted by any mixture. Happy, therefore, the soul that seeks God in the things appertaining to God, and nothing but God! Be pleased to remark these words: "that seeks God, and nothing but God." Such, if I may venture so to speak, is the twofold seal of true piety. Not to seek God, is a forgetfulness arising to a degree of contumely; and how should he accept of what is not offered him? To seek something with God is a petition that offends him. For, you have heard it said a thousand times, and it is certainly true, that the God whom we serve, or whom we ought to serve, is a jealous God; and of a heart like ours, that is, a heart he hath himself formed, he will suffer no part to be withheld from him. This he hath declared in the old and new law. He hath told us himself by the mouth of his prophet, that *he* was too great, and *our* heart too narrow, for anything else to find room in it along with him: and by the mouth of his Son, our Lord and Saviour, he hath expressly informed us, that we cannot serve two masters at once, God and mammon, private interest and the cause of virtue. And by what interest ought we, O Lord, to be swayed or influenced, but by the good fortune of finding you and serving you? Now by seeking you, and nothing but you, we shall infallibly find you, and be in a condition to posssss you eternally. Are you not enough for us? What more is requisite to satisfy our desires? We will, therefore, say with the prophet, O Lord, and in the same spirit: "What have I in heaven but thee? And what upon the earth do I desire beside thee?" Ps. lxxii. What can heaven and earth afford me more dear to me than my God—so dear to me as my God—nay, dear to me in any wise except my God, or what is included in my God? "What do I desire beside?" Yes, O Lord, you shall be henceforward my whole treasure, and my whole glory. Then, beloved Christians, there will only remain for us to make our piety internal, whereas that of the Pharisees consisted wholly in outward appearance, which is the subject of the third and last part.

PART III. The fathers of the church have often started this difficulty: why God, who judges every individual at the instant of death, should judge them again at the end of the world. Among the various reasons they assign for it, none appears to me more solid than that of St. Gregory of Nazianzen. God (says he) will act in this manner, in order to make known to the whole

universe, by a general judgment, what was the life and conduct of each particular man. At present the greatest part of men appear differently from what they are. The righteous, through humility, oftentimes assume the guise of sinners; and sinners through hypocrisy, as often counterfeit the piety of the righteous. For this reason, the righteous are condemned on a thousand occasions, and sinners are cleared from imputed guilt, and patronized. Now is it not the will of God to put a stop to this irregularity? and upon this account it is, that God hath preordained a general judgment, by which all the most hidden secrets of the heart will be revealed, and by which we shall acquire a perfect knowledge of vice and virtue. "Son of man," says the Lord to Ezechiel, "dost thou think thou seest what they do?" Ezech. viii. Art thou capable to find out the deeds of my people, and to know what the nature of those deeds is? No, thou knowest nothing of them, because thou seest no more of them than the external appearance: "Dig in the wall, go in, and behold the wicked abominations that they do." Ezech. viii. To thee it seems as if those people honoured me, because they place themselves before my altar in an humble posture, and offer me sacrifices; but I tell thee, I reject all those sacrifices. But, Lord, was it not yourself that ordered them? Thou art mistaken: my orders were for sacrifices that originated from piety. Now in all that they do there is no more than a certain exterior which strikes the eyes. It would seem, indeed, as if they had some zeal for me, but it is a vain monster, "an idol of zeal." Ezech. viii.

This, beloved hearers, is the light in which our Saviour himself represents the false piety of the Pharisees. A superficial piety, all on the lips, all in the countenance, and nothing in the heart. For this reason, our Saviour compares them to whited sepulchres. Mind only the outside, and they are perfectly beautiful; but open them, and search them narrowly to the bottom, and you will find nothing but infection and rottenness: "Wo unto you, because you are like unto whited sepulchres." Matt. xxiii. But, St. Chrysostom asks, why this comparison? It is very natural and very apposite, (replies this father,) because not to be holy but to outward appearance, is no more than, as I may say, a carcase of piety, a body without a soul, only fit to be shut up in a tomb. In reality, what doth God expect from man but the heart? And without the heart, what is there in man worthy of God? It is,

therefore, in the heart that the life of the righteous man consists, as it is by the heart that he pleases God, that he loves God, and that he deserves the love and favour of God. Take away from him this love of the heart, and all is dead in the order of grace, as all is dead in the order of nature, so soon as the heart ceases to live.

Hence it is that Almighty God, complaining by his prophets of the infidelity of the Jews, reduceth his reproaches to these or the like usual terms: that their hearts are far from him; that they have turned their hearts away from him; that their hearts are hardened against him: "Hearken unto me, ye hard hearted." Isa. xlvi. Hence it is that the royal psalmist, describing a good man and a sinner, makes this essential difference between them, namely, that the good man hath an upright heart; that he labours in the service of God from his heart; that "he carries the law of God in his heart;" (Ps. xxxvi.;) but that the sinner, on the contrary, hath a vain heart, a corrupted heart; that in his heart he rebels against God; that "he says in his heart, there is no God." Ps. xiii. Hence it is that the same prophet, in the prayers so frequent and so ardent, which he put up to God, sometimes would say to him: prove my heart, O Lord, prove my heart; sometimes would entreat him to give him a new heart, a pure heart; sometimes would excite himself to praise and bless him with his whole heart; sometimes would express the whole disposition of his soul by calling him the God of his heart. I should be obliged to run through all the Scriptures, did I take upon me to set forth everything they contain to the commendation of this inward piety, this piety of the heart.

But, beloved Christians, if this affection of the heart was requisite to true piety in the old law, how much more so in the evangelical law, since Jesus Christ himself came down from heaven particularly to form true adorers in spirit upon earth? And it ought to be remembered, that he styles such only true adorers: "The hour cometh," says he, "and now it is, when the true adorers shall adore the Father in spirit and in truth." John iv. Whence it follows, that all others are false adorers; and that all worship, whatever it be, that is not joined to this worship of the mind, that doth not flow from this worship of the mind, that is not dignified by this worship of the mind, is a false worship. I would not, however, insinuate that this external worship is criminal in itself; neither do I say that it is absolutely unprofitable,

nor that it should or can be lawfully neglected. I know there are prayers, ceremonies, and practices, instituted in religion, to glorify God, by which, in fact, God accounts himself glorified, and by which he requires that we give him glory. But I hold that God doth not esteem himself in any sort honoured by all this, any farther than the spirit bears a part therein; and that without this internal view, this conversion of the spirit toward him, he accepts nothing of all this, because in all this there is nothing proportioned to his Being and to his greatness. For, (according to the excellent reason which our Saviour himself hath given,) "God is a Spirit, and (by consequence) they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth." John iv. And by another consequence, equally incontestable, not to pay him this worship in spirit, whatever we may otherwise deem of it, is not to honour him in truth, but in figure only. Now, the God of heaven cannot be content with this seeming worship; and being truly God, "they that worship him, must [necessarily] worship him in spirit and in truth."

If this be the case, beloved hearers, what must we think of many works which we see performed in the Christian religion, and what fruit can we suppose to be drawn from them? Of what merit or value can they be in the presence of God? I say nothing of works done through ostentation, or from interested views; if any reward for such can be hoped for, it is not from God, who condemns them as criminal. I speak of works done without intention, without recollection or reflection, out of custom or complaisance, entirely void of the Spirit of God. This is an abuse, if not universal, at least general, even in professions the most holy. Mind this, I beseech you. We recite offices, and formularies of devotion, composed of and filled with the most beautiful sentiments of faith, of hope, of the love of God, of confidence in God, of submission to the will and order of God. But after spending whole hours in this manner, perhaps we have not made one act either of faith, or of hope, or of love, or of confidence, or of submission. The reason is, that in whatever the lips pronounced, the heart had no share. We appear before the altar, we bend the knee, we remain in an humble and suppliant posture; and during, perhaps, the whole time we spend in this manner, we render not the least homage to God; perhaps we do not once acquit ourselves of the duty of religion towards this Sovereign Master, by paying him adoration. The

reason is, that religion consists not either in bowing the head, or in a composed countenance, but in humility of mind; and that the mind hath not accompanied, one moment, all these demonstrations of respect and adoration. We go into hospitals, we visit prisons, we comfort the afflicted, we assist the poor; and, perhaps, he who in this respect shows the most zeal and assiduity, performs not one of the works of mercy. The reason is, that he is impelled either by a certain natural activity, or affected by a compassion quite human, or led on by custom, or drawn and influenced by some other object than God, and of which he follows the impression.

A great and important lesson this for us ministers of Christ Jesus. Allow me to make this observation. I shall do it more for my own confusion, than for your instruction. Called to the ministry, and particularly devoted to the worship and service of Almighty God, in how many pious and religious services are we every day taken up! Our whole life is nothing but a round of sacred functions, that succeed one another by rotation, and almost without interruption. We sing the praises of the Almighty Lord, some in public, and others in private. We offer on the altar the unbloody sacrifice of the Immaculate Lamb. We publish the doctrines of Christ in the pulpit, and explain them to the people. We reconcile sinners to God at the sacred tribunal of penance, and serve them as guides in the way of salvation. We are, by our station, interpreters of God, agents, vicegerents, and men of God. What an honour, my brethren, and above all what holiness in such a vocation and ministration! And yet there is more than enough to humble us and make us tremble. For there is but too much room to fear, that this holiness is not in the ministers, but in the ministry. By familiarizing ourselves (if I may so speak) with holy things, we become accustomed to them, and often in such a manner as to lose the whole relish and spirit of them. The heart is no longer affected with them; and while the common people are feelingly moved by our adorable mysteries, we treat them with as much indifference and coolness as profane matters.

This lesson is not less necessary for great numbers of devout persons, or at least persons who bear that name and reputation. They receive the sacraments; and so far they are deserving of our praise. But if they be not extremely watchful, the frequent repetition of confession and communion becomes a custom; and custom, by little

and little, diminishes the first fervour, and weakens those secret and holy motions with which they were animated.

What then is the consequence? They fall into two kinds of hypocrisy. I say into two kinds; for they are not, I grant you, formal hypocrisies, and with full deliberation, but yet they are extremely pernicious errors—one, with respect to the public; the other, with respect to themselves. That is, without intending it, they deceive the public, and themselves too. Both are easily understood. They deceive the public, because all this external devotion, on which they plume themselves, if rightly considered, is nothing in itself but a sign of the internal devotion of the heart. The branches, leaves, and flowers, shoot outwardly; but they suppose a root hidden and fastened in the bosom of the earth. If, therefore, you have nothing but the branches, leaves, and flowers; if you have only the sign that strikes the eye, and the foundation is wanting, it is a deceitful sign, denoting that which is not, and not denoting that which is. A man passes for a saint: we judge by what we see; we extol one, and look upon another as a pattern of virtue. But what is this virtue but a false light, or specious phantom, that hath nothing substantial or real in it? Alas! brother, (says St. Chrysostom,) be what you appear to be, or cease to appear to be what you are not.

But the worst of it is, that they deceive themselves. They think they lead a truly Christian life, as in fact it seems to be. They imagine that all the good works they perform are quite meritorious in the sight of God, not reflecting that there is no such thing as a good work which doth not proceed from the same principle which ought to produce it, and which alone can sanctify it. They willingly hear their own praises; they receive them with satisfaction; they would gladly persuade themselves that such praises are well founded. They dwell upon reflections on their own conduct, which keeps up the delusion. They say, (like the bishop in the Revelation,) I am rich, or at least I labour to enrich myself, and daily increase my treasure for heaven. What an extravagant blindness! Instead of the abundance, with the possession of which you flatter yourself, you cannot discern your poverty and misery. You vainly imagine that your hands are full, like one who dreams that he hath found a treasure, but, waking, finds that he is still in want, and "hath nothing in his hands." Ps. lxxv. If God himself could be deceived, and his all-seeing eyes were unable

to penetrate the blaze that surrounds you, you would not be so much to be pitied. But he sees what it is not in your power to see. Alas! Christians, when we shall appear before the bar of this sovereign Judge, and be called to an account not only for our crimes and our vicious habits, but even for our virtues, what will he do? Will the determination of our eternal lot be regulated by the outward appearance of our actions? Hath he not told us by his prophets and apostles, that "he will search our souls with the rays of his light?" Sophon. i. That he "will lay open our thoughts, our views, and our designs." 1 Cor. iv. That he "will weigh all this in the scale of justice, and that whatever shall be under weight shall be reprobated?" Dan. v. Many, very many, of these false prophets shall present themselves before him for the crown of glory, to which he will make answer: "I profess unto you I never knew you." Matt. vii. They foretold future events, they worked miracles, they acquired the esteem, the admiration, and the confidence of mankind by elaborate discourses, by finished works on pious subjects, by new institutions and charitable foundations. They were spoken of in the world, they were the boast of the people;-whole provinces, whole kingdoms resounded their praises. But God will disown them; because, in all that, the lustre was equally shining and frivolous; and, because the day of universal doom will make it disappear all at once, not leaving the least trace behind, whereon he will deign to cast an eye.

Wherefore, my brethren, let us rectify our notions, and let us follow the advice of the great apostle: "Whatsoever ye do in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ." Colos. iii. Let us say nothing, let us undertake nothing, let us carry nothing into execution, but in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and with a view to God. The ark of the Lord was all gold, both within and without; and we ought to resemble the ark of the Lord. If, like the Pharisees, we content ourselves with cleansing the outside of the vessel, and neglect the rest, we expose ourselves to lie under the same malediction that they lay under. Let us offer the sacrifice of Abel, not of Cain: Abel offered up the very best of his flock, and Cain the very worst. You know how greatly God was pleased with the victim of the one, and with what horror he turned his eyes from that of the other. In like manner, in order to devote ourselves effectually to God, let us give him, above all things, what

is most excellent and noble in us, which is the understanding. Let us begin with that, go on with that, and conclude with that; for all depends upon the understanding; and whatever is governed by the understanding, becomes worthy of God and his eternal rewards.

SERMON XVI.

ON SCANDAL.

For the Second Sunday of Advent.

"*Jesus making answer, said to them: Go, and relate to John what you have heard and seen. The blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear, the dead rise again: and blessed is the man that shall not be scandalized in me.*" MATT. xi.

THE Saviour of the world, beloved Christians, after having wrought such illustrious miracles, had a right to expect that mankind, far from taking scandal at the precepts of his gospel, would look upon it as an honour to embrace and follow them. Such numbers of the deaf, the dumb, the blind, and the lame cured, and of the dead raised to life; so many other miraculous operations, which so visibly and irrefragably displayed the virtue and power of a God, ought to have attracted and commanded the respect and veneration, nay, the worship and adoration of the whole earth. But, oh! the depth of the decrees of heaven! Christ Jesus, nevertheless, is a scandal to mankind; a scandal so general, that himself in the gospel declares "the man happy who shall not be scandalized in him."

But what is the world (I mean the profane and impious world) scandalized at in this God-man? At his person, at his doctrine, at his law, at his sufferings, at his death; insomuch that St. Paul, when he mentioned to the faithful the mystery of the cross, called it not the mystery, but the scandal of the cross: "The scandal of the cross is made void." Gal. v. By which mode of speech he would inculcate to the faithful, that the cross would be a token of contradiction for the reprobated, which for the predestinated

would be a mystery of redemption; and that the great scandal of men, would be the very God that became man to save them.

Such, at that time, was the language of the apostles; but (praise be to God) that sort of scandal is now no more. Christ Jesus hath triumphed over the world and its adherents; his doctrine is received, his religion prevails, his cross (according to the expression of St. Augustin) is an ornament to the brows of sovereigns and monarchs. But to that kind of scandal of which Christ was the object, another hath succeeded, of which we are ourselves the authors: another not less deplorable, and perhaps more criminal. My meaning is this: Jesus Christ is now to us no occasion of scandal; but we are occasion of scandal to Jesus Christ. We are not scandalized at him, but we give him scandal in the persons of our brethren. As it is written, that St. Paul, by persecuting the church, persecuted him: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" In like manner, might he not say to us, why scandalize ye me, by scandalizing those who appertain to me, and whom I have made the members of my mystical body? Now it is this kind of scandal (I mean the scandal given to our neighbour) that I shall make the subject of the present discourse.

Our blessed Saviour declares the man who shall not be scandalized in him, happy; but I conclude, by a contrary inference, that unhappy is the man who scandalizes Christ, by scandalizing his neighbour. This, Christians, is the important point I undertake to demonstrate. The sin of scandal, which God detests and condemns so loudly in a thousand places of the inspired writings; the sin, with which he so emphatically reproached an unfaithful soul: "Against thy mother's son thou didst lay a scandal;" (Ps. xlix.;) a trap for his innocence, and occasioned his fall; and heedless of the grief which your common mother, the church of Christ, would feel by his loss, made no difficulty of giving him scandal; the sin, which (according to the doctrine of Tertullian) paves the way to crimes, in the same manner that good example doth to virtue. Of this sin, beloved Christians, I purpose to give you a comprehensive, clear, and accurate notion; I purpose to inspire you with a horror and detestation of it; and with the divine assistance of the Word of God, I purpose to teach you to fear and shun it. To that intent, I shall advance two propositions, which shall make the divisions of this discourse.

First: wo be to the man who causes scandal.

Secondly: wo in the last degree to him, when specially obliged to give good example.

Wo be to the man who causes scandal. This is the nature of the sin I shall speak upon; which, considered absolutely, is universally diffused through all ranks of people. But wo in the last degree to him, when it is incumbent on him, in a particular manner, to give good example. This is the particular species of this sin, which, although confined to certain states of life, is, nevertheless, as you shall see, but too extensive. Wo be to the man, whoever he be, that is a scandal to his brother, and occasions his fall; but wo in the last degree to the man who scandalizes him, when, besides the reciprocal title of Christian, there is still another more peculiar and personal, which lays on him an obligation of giving edification. In the first, I shall lay down for you, on this important subject, general rules and maxims that will be suitable to all. In the second, I shall draw, from the difference of your conditions, particular, but pressing motives, to inspire each of you, upon this head, according to your different conditions in life, with all the necessary zeal and vigilance.

Part I. It must needs be that scandals come. It is Christ himself that says it, and it is one of those mysteries in which the judgments of God should seem the most impenetrable. For, on what foundation is this necessity raised? On none other than the iniquity of the world, which God is at no loss to convert to his glory, but the course of which he is not pleased to stop upon all occasions by the extraordinary means of his absolute power. The world (as St. Chrysostom, explaining this passage, admirably remarks) being so perverted as it is, and the Almighty Lord, for reasons known only to his providential wisdom, letting it remain in the corruption in which we behold it, and not choosing to work miracles for its redress, it is a necessary consequence, and "must needs be that scandals come." Matt. xviii. But however necessary, however infallible, this consequence be, a dreadful curse against the author of scandal is pronounced in these words by the Son of God: "Nevertheless, wo be to that man by whom the scandal cometh." Matt. xviii. A curse (says St. Chrysostom) which the preachers of the gospel can neither too often repeat to their audiences, nor depict in colours too striking and lively. Therefore, dear Christians, lend all your attention, and remember that this is the religious duty in which it behoves you, perhaps of all, the most particularly

to be well instructed. "Wo to that man by whom the scandal cometh." The reason is, that he is a murderer, in the sight of God, of all the souls to whom he gives scandal; and that he is answerable to the God of heaven for the crimes of all those to whom he gives scandal: two reasons, adduced by St. Chrysostom, and capable to affect the most obdurate heart, in which there remains the least spark of faith. Give unusual force, O Lord, to my words! And you, Christians, be more attentive than ever, and let nothing escape you of that with which it shall please God to inspire me for your instruction.

1st. The author of scandal becomes a murderer of every soul he scandalizes. A monstrous sin, a diabolical sin, a sin against the Holy Ghost, a sin essentially opposed to the redemption of our Saviour, Christ; a sin for which we shall be particularly accountable before God's tribunal: but what in a manner still more singular deserves your reflection, a sin the more dangerous, as it is common in the world, as it is every day purposely and maliciously committed; as it is annexed to such things as are seemingly trivial, of which scruple is not made, but which still imports enormous criminality in the presence of God. Take all this along with you, and judge yourselves, whether in every particular, and in the strictest sense, I adhere not to truth.

A monstrous sin: for how horrible is it to be the death of a soul that was righteous and innocent, pleasing and precious in the sight of God! To deprive her of a supernatural and divine life, and make her lose her inheritance to the kingdom of God? Now this, beloved hearers, when you scandalize your neighbour, is the sin you commit. Were he the meanest of men, whose fall you have occasioned, whether by diverting him from doing good, or inducing him to do ill, or communicating to him your wicked inclinations, or influencing his disposition by your contagious example; were he, I say, the meanest, and in every respect the most despicable of men, you are still culpable. And this is what our Saviour lays before us in the gospel so clearly and so distinctly, the purport of which is very extensive: "Whoever shall scandalize one of these little ones who believe in me." Matt. xviii. It is observable (says St. Chrysostom) that Jesus Christ says not, whoever scandalizes a great man. This is a crime of a much deeper die, and more to be lamented in the Christian world; a crime, notwithstanding, but too common among the sons of Adam. How many have there

been in all ages, and, at this very time, what numbers there are, who, by an inscrutable judgment of the Supreme Ruler, seem to approach the great, and to partake of their favour, only to poison and corrupt their minds with detestable maxims and hellish advice! Be that as it may, the moral intent of our Lord and Saviour in the words just quoted, is not restrained to the condition of the great. He says: "Whosoever scandalizeth one of these little ones;" and thereby, Christians, rectifies the mistake you may possibly be in—that the meanness of the person should ever authorize or give colour to sin. True it is, the person you scandalize is a low-lived creature, a mean creature; it is an abject soul (according to the notions of the world) that is subject to your incontinence. But this so vile and worthless a soul (according to the notions of the world) is, in the views of God, of infinite value. And therefore, the God who created it, who redeemed it, who knew how to rate it according to its worth, declares, that as often as you give it scandal, "it were better for you that you were drowned in the depth of the sea." Matt. xviii.

A diabolical sin: and the reason which St. Chrysostom gives for it is evident. For (according to the gospel) the distinguishing characteristic of the devil, is, that "he was a murderer from the beginning." He was a murderer, (continues this holy doctor), because, from the beginning of the world, he made souls perish by seducing them, by putting snares in their way, by making them yield to temptation, by laying obstacles to their conversion. And is not this the constant employment of the libertine liver, the vicious man, the man hurried away by the spirit of impurity, who, immersed in debauchery, seeks out on all sides (if I may use the expression) a prey for his sensuality? What doth he besides, or in what else is his scandalous life taken up? Is it not in deceiving and damning souls, in prevailing over their weakness, in imposing on their simplicity, in making the most of their imprudence, in taking the advantage of their vanity, in undermining their religion, in triumphing over their modesty, in dissipating their just fears, in rendering ineffectual all their good inclinations? Is it not in keeping them back from the ways of God, when, touched with his grace, they feel the weight of their iniquity, and are sincerely desirous of recovering their innocence? Are not these, O sinner, the works of darkness in which your infamous life is spent? Is not this doing the office of the evil spirit, and the more dangerously, because they

whom you scandalize, being used, like yourself, to be drawn by the senses, lie open to your baneful insinuations, and take more lasting and deeper impressions? The devil was, of himself, a murderer from the beginning; but is a murderer now, by your agency. It is you who are his adjutant, who furnish him with weapons, who carry on his enterprises, who are the tempter in his room, who murder souls, by scandalously sacrificing them to your passions and pleasures.

A sin against the Holy Ghost, because directly against charity, and the Holy Ghost is personally charity itself. Now is this sufficient: I add, because charity is wounded by it in the most essential part; and because in regard to this necessary virtue, of which the Holy Ghost himself is the origin, it, if I may so speak, renders a man criminal against the supreme Being. For, (as St. Chrysostom judiciously argues,) if by theft or fraud you deprive your neighbour of temporal effects; if by calumny or slander you destroy his reputation; if by ill offices you ruin his credit, which ends but in the loss of a perishable fortune; if, according to all the rules of religion, these are so many transgressions against the charity he hath a right to expect from you: what shall I say of the scandal that stops his progress in virtue, and obstructs his salvation? No, no: so flagitious a disposition and brotherly love never abode together in the same heart: "He that loveth his brother, abideth in the light, and scandal in him there is none." 1 John ii. And, indeed, there needs charity but in a moderate degree, to beware of bringing him, by giving him scandal, into infinite detriment. When God permitted the prince of darkness to wreak his vengeance on the property and person of the good man Job, he put his natural and mortal life out of danger: "Behold he is in thy hands, but yet save his life." Job ii. But might I not say, with still greater reason, to the scandalous sinner: if your brother hath the misfortune to offend you, and to incur your indignation, and is the object of your hatred, carry your injustice to what length you please, but carry not your vengeance to the depriving him of a spiritual and immortal life. Give a thousand vexations, bring him into trouble, fill him with uneasiness, raise persecutions against him; but spare at least his soul, make no base attempt on his conscience and salvation; but yet save his spiritual and immortal life. It follows, therefore, necessarily, that whoever makes light of scandalizing his brother, is devoid of charity, and by consequence,

before God, is the destruction of his brother and of charity too; for "every one that hateth his brother is a murderer." 1 John iii. Now, how many doth the present age exhibit in this category? That is, how many are hurried away by the spirit of libertinism; and, far from being disturbed at the loss of souls, affect to contribute to it with all their might, seek occasions and opportunities, and feel self-complacency at having succeeded? Can any crime be more atrocious against the heavenly Spirit and his holy grace?

I proceed farther, and say: a sin essentially opposed to the redemption of Jesus Christ. For, whereas Jesus Christ, who is styled, and is eminently, the Son of man, came into the world, as Redeemer of men, to seek and save that which had been lost; (Luke xix.;) so the son of perdition, (and such, says Tertullian, is the giver of scandal,) with a contrary view, comes to damn and to ruin that which he hath ransomed. And it is in this particularly that the apostle makes the grievousness of scandal to consist. On this was grounded that pathetic remonstrance which he made to the Corinthians, conjuring them to leave off certain customs, to which they were addicted, and at which the brethren, not yet thoroughly confirmed in the faith, were scandalized. There are weak brethren among you, (says he,) and you assume liberties which occasion their fall. But know you not, that these brethren, whom your conduct scandalizes, are numbered among the faithful, are true believers, for whom the blessed Jesus shed his precious blood, and that the scandal you give them, and the ruin you bring on them, by your bad example, destroy, in their persons, the merit and fruit of the death of a God? Shall then Jesus Christ (continues the apostle) have suffered and died for them to no purpose? Shall your brother, as yet weak, be eternally damned, because you thought it proper to disregard his weakness, and not have the consideration for him which Christian charity and prudence required? Shall that be torn, as it were, by violence, from the bosom of Jesus Christ, for which he poured forth every drop of his blood? "And so through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish for whom Christ died." 2 Cor. viii.

Thus spoke St. Paul; and his manner of reasoning was sufficiently convictive. The pious zeal with which the Corinthians were animated and inflamed for their Lord and Saviour, induced them to return within proper bounds, and not draw upon themselves the just reproach of being enemies to his cross, by contributing to make

"the weak brother perish for whom Christ died." How often, by criminal liberties, which you ought to have abandoned, have you wounded consciences, and been the death of souls, for which your divine Saviour laid down his life! And if what St. John says in his first Canonical Epistle, be true, that "throughout the world there are many antichrists;" (1 John ii.;) because it is overrun with unworthy Christians, who destroy and bring to naught, by their scandalous example, the work of Jesus Christ, and invalidate the price of his adorable redemption: of those who hear me, to how many is not, in the literal sense, this malediction of the apostle applicable: "Now there are many antichrists!" How many antichrists are there lurking in the heart of Christianity, the more to be dreaded, the more hidden and the less known they are!

A sin, therefore, for which we shall be accountable in a particular manner at the bar of heaven. For of all the menaces which I find in the scripture, one of the most terrible and emphatic is, that God Almighty will call us to a severe account, not only for our own, but our neighbour's sins: "I will require his blood from thy hands." Ezech. iii. But am I answerable for any but myself? said the guilty Cain, endeavouring to clear himself in the presence of God. "Am I my brother's keeper?" A manner of speaking not unusual at this day with worldlings. Am I engaged, am I responsible for the salvation of another? Yes, (replies the Lord, by the mouth of his prophet,) you are responsible for it to me; and when I shall come, as sovereign Judge, in order to give to each one according to his deserts, and pronounce my last decrees, I shall evidently have a right, by the laws of equity, to be revenged of you for innumerable grievous crimes, of which you were the promoter and original cause. For, your brother perished by your solicitations; the purity of his soul was tarnished and defiled by your conversation; his mind was corrupted by the errors and maxims of your licentiousness; his heart was poisoned by the attractions and charms of your dissolute life. It is owing to you that he first conceived a disgust of his duty; your satirical merriment and irreligious sarcasms induced him to withdraw himself from the divine law, and totally swerve from Christian observances. If he is engaged in evil ways, it proceeds from the connexions he hath had with you; if he is swayed by his passions, it proceeds from his glorying in being your imitator; if he hath contracted your vices, it proceeds from a desire of giving you pleasure. This

(says the Almighty in the fulness of his wrath) is what will be imputed to you, and I will punish with the utmost severity. It was by your means that this man became impious; influenced by your example, he led a wicked life, and died in his wickedness; but his blood, will louder than that of Abel, cry out to my throne, and will pressingly call upon me for justice against you. And what will be your plea? "The same wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but I will require his blood from thy hand." Ezech. iii. I will undertake, O wicked sinner, I will undertake, to thy cost, the cause of this soul, this reprobated soul, which thou hast destroyed; and reprobated as it is, I shall still be concerned for it, and will retort its reprobation on thy devoted head.

Enough, beloved Christians, have I said to make you comprehend the grievousness of this sin. But not to insist any longer thereon, I shall now set forth the strongest inducement to watch its approaches, and the best and safest rule we can follow in order to guard against it. A sin, of which we are often guilty without intending to commit it. I wish I were so happy as to make you comprehend this important verity, and so far to prevail on you, as that each one should apply this lesson to himself! For we may scandalize souls without forming deliberately a design to damn them, or having a determinate will to make our neighbour fall. The devil only is capable of such maliciousness; and none (says St. Chrysostom) but the devil, can love the scandal for the scandal's sake. It is not requisite that I have an express will to ruin my brother: it is enough that I perceive I ruin him effectually; that my conduct, of itself, hath a tendency to ruin him; and that I perform some action, in consequence of which he will undoubtedly be ruined. But I would not that he were ruined. True: but to will that he be not ruined, and to will, at the same time, that which ruins him outright, (replies St. Chrysostom,) are two contradictory wills; and the worst of it is, that of these two wills—the one good, the other bad; the former by which you wish that your brother may not be ruined, is but a half will, an imperfect will, an unavailing will—one of those velleities with which hell abounds, and which effectually lead us to damnation; whereas the latter, whereby you wish that which is the origin of his ruin, is an efficacious will, an absolute will, a consummate will, a will carried into execution, which communicates perversion, and causes damnation.

Thus a woman of the world, filled with airy notions, and no

way actuated by the Spirit of God, is engaged in reciprocal visits and conversations, which, however dangerous, she will not interrupt, nevertheless, bears witness to her own innocence, and that she never entertained any criminal intention. She sees, notwithstanding, that by this communication she inflames the passions of a sensual man; that she excites in his heart irregular desires; that she takes him off from the way of salvation; that she encourages, not a little, his idle cajolery; and that by not discountenancing his frequent attendance, without a will to ruin him, she ruins him effectually. Is she, therefore, the less a murderer of his soul? No, Christian; the scandal she gives is a grievous sin. Her real intention, by this intercourse, is to indulge her vanity. But setting aside her real intention, her vanity kindles and nourishes, in the breast of this young man, immodest affections. For that respect which he pays to her person she terms complaisance, which she terms civility, and she is fully determined to stop there. But her resolution cannot hinder the effect of her complaisance from going still farther, and from bringing, in spite of her, destruction on him whose affections she means to preserve, and no more, and to renounce whom she hath not sufficient fortitude of mind.

Upon that account I said—(and oh! that you would turn the daily experience you have of it to advantage)—upon that account I said, and I say it again, that this murdering of souls was often a concomitant to trivial matters in the eyes of the world, but an utter abomination, if maturely considered, in the presence of God; a concomitant to looseness of attire, to luxury of decoration, to undisguised allurements, to the tyranny of the mode which the prince of the world, that is, the devil of the flesh, hath invented; to levity and privacy, wherein the bounds of decorum are passed without difficulty; to particular conversations, the secrecy, the familiarity, the agreeableness of which effeminates the strong, and infatuates the sage; to an irregular and too free a vein of humour; to a passion to please and pass for agreeable. But all this, say you, is innocent. What! (replies St. Jerom) do you call that innocent, which so deeply wounds your neighbour's soul? And though, as you apprehend, (the inconsistency of which Almighty God will make known,) all this were perfectly innocent in itself, when you find its consequences to be so deplorable, ought you not to reject it with detestation and horror?

Did St. Paul reason thus, and are these the principles and

moral documents he hath left in the church? No, no, (says this apostolical man,) that I shall never suppose allowable, which I foresee, and which I know, cannot but be detrimental to my brother's soul. He discoursed of the flesh of animals offered up in sacrifice to idols; flesh not contaminated in itself, but which, on the contrary, might be eaten indifferently by those of the faithful who had upright consciences, that is, who had no propensity to idolatrous worship, and made a sincere profession of believing only in the living God. It matters not, (says this vessel of election, this man raised by God to instruct us in our duty and improve our morals,) if the meat which I eat should scandalize my brother, though the use of it be forbidden by no other law, I will condemn myself to forbearance by the law of charity: "If meat scandalize my brother, I will never eat flesh." 1 Cor. viii. Are you then, beloved Christians, more privileged than St. Paul was? Are you not equally bound by the law of charity? Are you allowed to plead exemption from it more than he was? And if this great apostle, giving up his right, thought it incumbent on him to abstain from flesh, though not prohibited, but which he apprehended might give rise to scandal, with what face can you affirm, in the presence of God, that a hundred things are matters of indifference, of which you well know the pernicious effects, having learned by experience how prejudicial they are to those who approach you? No, (we ought to say with the apostle of Christ, a truly Christian soul,) if these practices, these customs, which the world authorizes, and which gratify my self-love, are a cause of scandal, whatever my reason may allege to the contrary in their behalf, I am determined to relinquish them; be they ever so innocent, to outward appearance, I abhor, I detest, I renounce them for ever: "If meat scandalize my brother, I will never eat flesh."

2ndly. Thus you must speak, thus you must reason, if you speak and reason from principles of religion. Otherwise—(and it is, as I at first observed, the second misfortune of him that gives scandal)—otherwise, beloved hearers, you are answerable in the presence both of God and man, not only for the particular crime you commit, by scandalizing your brother, but in general for all the crimes which he whom you scandalize commits, or shall commit. Now, who can fathom and measure the depth of this abyss? Or, to use an expression of the divine Spirit, how "deep calleth on deep!" Who can number them up? And who but yourself, O God,

"that beholdest the depths," is capable to comprehend them? Of how many sins may not, for instance, bad advice be productive? Violent and unjust advice, given to a man in power and authority, which induces him to gratify his vengeance or ambition, what mischiefs it produces! What disturbances arise from it! What a multiplicity and variety of sins it brings after it! You are too knowing not to see the consequences, and have too much sensibility not to shudder at them. Now faith informs us, that whoever is the author of such advice, participates, the very moment he gives it, without other participation than merely the giving of it, in the whole guilt of those misfortunes; and, whether he will or not, is responsible for all the injustices of him who follows it, and carries it into execution. How incomparable are the judgments of our heavenly Lord! How the sons of men must be delivered over to excessive folly and a reprobate sense, when they forget such great and terrible truths!

But sins, you say, are personal; and although Almighty God be strict in his judgments, he is merciful, and desirous to dispel our fears, when he tells us by his prophet: "The soul that sinneth, the same shall die." Ezech. x. By which he would teach us, that each one will be answerable for his own sins; that "the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, and the father shall not bear the iniquity of the son;" (Ezech. x.;) that when we shall appear before the sovereign tribunal, "every one shall bear his own burden," (Gal. vi.;) and not that of another. I join issue with you; for all these I know to be so many oracles, set down faithfully in the inspired writings, which, according to the ordinary course of justice, will be verified with regard to sins of every kind, save the sin of scandal. The reason is this: the sin of scandal is not merely personal, but an original sin, in some degree, that insinuates and spreads itself through the soul of man, infecting her not only with its own venom, and its own malignity, but likewise with the venom and malignity of those to whom it extends. The scandalous sinner will, therefore, be excepted from these general rules, who, perpetrating crimes for himself and for others, will be arraigned for his own, and for the crimes of others, at the supreme bar. The reason of it is natural: for if, according to the law of God, he who sins must die; with much greater reason (says St. Chrysostom) should he die, who causes sin, who incites sin, who advises sin, who teaches sin, who sets example of sin; all this, in

which scandal consists, being indisputably more punishable, and more deserving of death than the sin itself. Therefore, it is true, that each one will be made to bear his own burden. But as to you, sinner, who have occasioned scandal, besides your own burden, you will be forced to undergo that of others too. And although such persons, whose iniquity you shall bear, will thereby be neither disencumbered nor justified; it is this foreign burden, this iniquity of others, that will finally overwhelm you.

And if it be urged that these sins were not known: known, or not known, (replies St. Jerom,) as they derived their origin from your sin, by an inevitable fatality they are laid to your charge. You knew not the irregularities of those you scandalized; but though you knew them not, you are not to be looked upon the less for that, as the original cause. You knew them not; but you ought to have known them, you ought to have dreaded them, you ought to have prevented them, and this you have neglected; and all this makes you liable to be punished according to the whole extent of their malignity.

For this reason, the most holy of kings, in the fervour of his penitence, beseeched the Almighty to grant him special grace against two kinds of sin, the consequences of which he apprehended to be endless; hidden sins, and the sins of others; sins which he himself unknowingly committed, and sins which he occasioned others to commit, but never imputed to himself as a fault: "Who can understand sins? From secret ones cleanse me, O Lord, and from those of others spare thy servant." Where is the man who knows all his failings, who endeavours to find them out, who, to lament and expiate them, hath the gift of discerning them? "Who can understand sins?" Purify, therefore, (adds he,) O God, purify me from those sins which my pride conceals from me, which by worldly dissipation I am hindered from discerning, which the cloud of my passions, or the veil of my ignorance, impedes the sight of: "From my secret ones cleanse me." But, at the same time, pardon me the sins of my neighbour, for which I am responsible; sins, to which I have unfortunately co-operated; sins, of which my conduct hath been the pernicious source; sins, with which you will one day reproach me, and which will complete, in conjunction with my own, the heavy burden that increases daily, and under which I shall, perhaps, ere long, be oppressed. Pardon me them, O Lord, and grant that I may pre-

vent, by means of exact and severe penance, the rigour of your judgment, "and from the sins of others spare thy servant."

A most holy prayer this, which the Spirit of God suggested to David, and the use of which, I doubt not, would be necessary for the greatest part of those who hear me. A prayer, which the woman of the world should put up to heaven every day of her life, in the spirit of compunction. And let it be remembered, that when I speak of a woman of the world, I mean not a woman devoid of religion, or even a vicious woman who leads a disorderly and libertine life. I speak of a woman, who, content with a specious regularity that dazzles, is far from a willingness to be under constraint, or submitting to walk in the straight way that leads to God. I speak of a woman, who, though she rates herself high for her faultless demeanour in essential points, nevertheless, by a thousand insinuating ways, and a studied vivacity, is a scandal to souls. I speak of a woman, who, without passion and without attachment, is oftentimes equally criminal with those who are passionately attached; and who, notwithstanding her apparent reputation of which she is so jealous, and of which she takes so great care as to escape censure, and the imputations consequent to the weaknesses of her sex, is not the less for that, on account of the sins she so often foments, an enemy to God. A prayer, from which would arise her conversion, if after the example of the inspired king, she said every day: "From the sins of others spare thy servant." Pardon me, O Lord, such a number of sins, of which I unreasonably believed myself clear in thy divine sight, and in which, blinded by self-love, I was made to believe I bore no part, but the weight of which now lies heavy upon me. Pardon me all those sins, all those desires, all those sensations, which are owing to my ornamental attire, to my insinuating conversation, to my engaging manner, though attended with a modesty that inspired me rather with a profane haughtiness, than Christian circumspection: "From the sins of others spare thy servant." But, O my Lord, what though in your goodness you should pardon my offences, can I pardon myself? Can I set bounds to my penitence, considering the obligation I am under of satisfying not only for myself, but for those sinners also, who, by my contrivances, were induced to enter upon sinful practices? "Who can understand sin? From my secret ones cleanse me, O Lord, and from those of others spare thy servant."

True it is, ye women of the world, this kind of language is not

usual with you. But God, the ruler of the human heart, may give, when he pleases, a blessing to my words. I know that the reformation of a scandalous sinner, in respect to salvation, is a great miracle; but the arm of the Lord is no way shortened. Let us hope for all things by the grace of Jesus Christ. It is more forcible than the whole world. How exuberant soever may be the iniquity of mankind, it will be no impediment to the designs of God. Some there are in this audience, who will persist in their scandal, refusing assent to these assertions; and others, though convinced of what I advance, will be too remiss to relinquish their habits. Among these hardened souls, however, there are whom God hath predestined; and possibly, at the moment I utter these words, he perceives some one, who, effectually persuaded of the truth I announce, is already resolved to retrench in his apparel, in his conduct, in his comportment, in his diversions, in his conversations, in his actions, whatever may be contrary, in any shape, to the purity of his religion, and the edification of his neighbour. Though I were to bring over only one to God, should I not thereby be sufficiently happy? Be that as it will, beloved hearers, these are documents laid down in the gospel, which we are bound to know, being one of the most formal and express articles of the faith we profess. Every scandalous sinner is a murderer of the souls to which he gives scandal, and is answerable to God for the crimes they commit. But if scandal, considered absolutely, and in itself, be so great an evil, what shall I say of that sort of scandal, which the same man gives, whose duty it is, in a special manner, to give good example? Wo be to the man who is the author of scandal; but wo be to him over and over again, when particularly bound to give edification.

Part II. Every man living by the common law of charity, is under an obligation of edifying his neighbour. And when St. Paul laid down as a rule for the Romans this great maxim: "Let every one of you please his own neighbour for his good to edification," (Rom. xv.,) it is evident that he spoke in general terms, not excepting condition, rank, or person. It must, however, be granted, that there are, on this head, particular engagements, and particular duties; and that, according to the different relations in which men may be considered throughout the community, and to their different connexions with one another, it is more incumbent on some, than on others, to comply with this law. In the course

of nature, a father, as such, is bound to give good example to his children. By the decrees of Providence, a master, or whoever is vested with power, is bound to edify, by his conduct and morals, all those who live in subjection to him. In the order of grace, the priests and ministers who attend the altar, are bound, agreeably to St. Peter's position, to be a model and rule to the flock of Christ, by the holiness of their lives: "Being made a pattern of the flock from the heart." 1 Pet. v. According to the doctrine delivered by St. Paul, those who are devoted, in a special manner, to the service of God, should particularly be careful to be sincere in their piety, and even, if possible, without reproach, in order to shut the mouths of impious men, or bring them over to God; at least, not to scandalize them or obstruct their return to the way of salvation. The stedfast in the faith, I mean Catholics, should live among their brethren who are disunited from them, with more attention, vigilance, and caution. And these assertions are all founded on the most solid and incontestable principles of Christianity.

If, therefore, in contravention to these duties, the scandal should proceed from the same source, from which ought to flow good and edifying example; or, to speak more clearly, if the very person, who, by God's appointment, is under a special obligation of giving edification to his neighbour, should be the first to scandalize him; ah! Christians, this is what completes the malediction of our Saviour, and should make us cry out in the bitterness of our soul: "Wo be to that man!" because (says St. Chrysostom) then the scandal is more contagious, and makes a deeper and more lasting impression on the soul; because then it is more difficult to guard against its influence; because then impiety takes greater advantage, and licentiousness and looseness of manners draw a more specious pretext, not only from possession, but from prescription. Be pleased to give ear to this second point of doctrine, in laying which before you, I shall entirely confine myself to those particular kinds of scandal which have just been mentioned.

1st. How great, beloved hearers, is the crime of a father, who, in disparagement to the name of Christian which he bears, and utterly unworthy to be called a father, by his bad example, scandalizes and corrupts his own children? It was his duty to bring them up in the exercise of religion; but, far from that, by his

impious discourses, by his jesting imprudently at our sacred mysteries, by his hatred and aversion to all holy things, by his affected opposition to whatever is denominated work of piety; in a word, by his impious unchristian life, he instils into them his spirit of libertinism, and principles destructive of all religion. It was his duty to correct the precipitancy of their temper, and repress the sallies of their growing passions; but he encourages them by a more shameful precipitancy of temper, and by sallies of passion more extravagant and senseless. It was his duty to provide for their improvement in virtue; but by his debauchery and excesses, excesses of which they are but too well apprised, excesses which he is not at the pains to conceal, they are hurried and misled into strange irregularities and depravity of manners. How many fathers in the Christian world, how many, perhaps, of those who hear me, are in this predicament? They are not content to be libertines themselves, they raise up in their children, by the education they give them, a generation of libertines. Their authority over them is exerted only to effect their ruin. They are their fathers only to transmit to them their vices, to inspire them with their ambition, to make them drink in with their milk the ranklings of their enmities, to entangle them in their injustices by making them inheritors of their ill-acquired fortunes. Were it not better (as St. Chrysostom observes) they had been stifled in their cradles? And if we reflect with horror and astonishment on the barbarous superstitition of those infidels, who were used to immolate their children to their idols; do they not stir up in us the same feelings, who, in direct contempt of the true God, to whom they well know their children have been consecrated in the saving laver, inhumanly sacrifice them to the spirit of the world, that evil spirit with which they are themselves possessed. Such, for the same reason, is the inordination of a mother, who by all laws is under an obligation of bringing up her daughters, servants of God, and spouses of Jesus Christ, but is so very blind, or to speak more properly, and allow me the expression, is so very cruel, as to make them slaves of Satan, and victims to vanity, teaching them the science of eternal damnation, on pretence of giving them a knowledge of the world, and destroying, by her example, all the lessons of virtue, which, in other respects, she is so well qualified to give them by words. For, notwithstanding the scandal she gives her own children, she expects they will listen with patience and sub-

mission to her admonitions and instructions. Whatever degree of liberty she assumes, whatever communication, whether suspected or undisguised, she is said to carry on, she perpetually preaches regularity to her daughters, and requires that they behave with circumspection and decency, with tractability and docility, while she takes, herself, the greatest latitudes, and will not comply with the most essential duties. But in this consists that species of scandal which I now encounter. For how can this zeal, though maternal, avail, when not supported, when frustrated, or, rather, when destroyed and annihilated, by her own example? What good effect can the remonstrances of a mother, whose reputation is blasted, have on the mind and conduct of a daughter, whose notions are far from the simplicity of the dove, and who, probably enough, by having seen too much, is become as clear-sighted and penetrating as the serpent.

2ndly. How great is the crime of a master of a family, who, forgetful of what he is, or abusing his power, and perverting the order of divine Providence, misleads and corrupts those whom it is his duty to inspect and direct? St. Paul has given us the dictate of the Holy Ghost upon this matter: "If any man take not care of his own, and especially those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." 1 Tim. viii. A short sentence this, but full of energy; a sentence, from which I should expect more, towards the reformation of your lives, and the sanctification of your souls, than from ever so many and such eloquent sermons, if you would, beloved hearers, but revolve it in your minds, and meditate upon it with due attention. But if St. Paul spoke thus of unattentive and careless, how would he have spoken of scandalous masters? If he calls mere negligence, or mere forgetfulness, in that which a master, as a Christian, owes his own family, apostacy, how would he have called the man, who, far from watching over, and being concerned for the salvation of those for whom, as master, he is responsible to God, perverts them himself, and is the immediate cause of their ruin and reprobation?

This, nevertheless, we every day see, and see to our grief and heart-felt anguish. For, that servant man, O man of the world, (suffer me a moment to indulge the zeal with which God inspires me, and which obliges me to be plain,) that servant man who hath your interest at heart, and is no way apprehensive for the loss of his soul, provided that by pleasing you he make a wretched for-

tune; that servant man must be the instrument and accomplice of your iniquitous practices, when you employ him in offices, which the respect I owe to the present audience, and the pulpit I speak in, forbids me to represent in their native colours, and real deformity. An abominable scandal, against which I might cry out a thousand times, "Wo be to that man," that man of fashion, that master!

And you, Christian women, (if yet, considering the life you lead, you pretend to that name,) to you it is owing, that the girl so innocent, so far from reproach, when she entered your service, is thoroughly conversant in the things of which she ought to have been ignorant all the days of her life. She becomes your confidant, and, against her inclination, is made privy to your intrigues, when you require of her those vile services in which obedience is her crime. God, by entrusting her to your care and inspection, made you the guardian of her innocence, and it is lost by your means. Your house should have been a school to her of virtue and integrity, and it is there you teach her to lay aside all modesty. She was of Christian morals, and a virtuous mind; and by an unfortunate engagement of her conscience with yours, her good inclinations are all checked, and all her principles of virtue destroyed. What answer will you make to an avenging God, when he shall produce her, in his judgment, covered over with your sins: and you shall see her in hell, the inseparable companion of your endless torments? Take not offence at the vehemence with which you imagine I speak: perhaps on no occasion was it ever more necessary.

But to pass over the scandals that go to such lengths as to make those about you accomplices of your crimes, what dangerous effects proceed oftentimes, when you think least of it, from your bare example? For, to believe that your conduct is to them unknown, and remains always a secret, is a gross mistake. That cannot be, beloved Christians; that never was. As many domestics as give you attendance, so many witnesses there are of your life; and not witnesses only, but censurers and spies, that have their eyes upon you, and do justice to your merit.

3rdly. How great is the crime of those ministers of the Lord, who, honoured with the most sacred character of the priesthood, and employed in the most holy functions of the altar, profane them by a secular and worldly demeanour, not to say an impure

and licentious life, and reflect disgrace and scandal on their ministry? They ought (according to the words of Christ Jesus) to be the salt of the earth, and it is by their means (says St. Gregory, pope,) that the earth is corrupted. They ought to be the light of the whole earth, and they shine forth only to expose to the world, with greater evidence, those stains and blemishes which are observed in them, and make the observer blush. They ought to be, and they are in fact, the town situated on a high mountain, and they seem raised only to make their vices the more conspicuous; vices that give the people surprise and uneasiness, and lay the priesthood open to reproach and ignomy. It was this that brought upon them the indignation of God, and obliged him to tell them by one of his prophets, what I should not dare apply to them, if I copied not from God, and spoke on his behalf, who alone hath the power to upbraid them in terms so pressing and so strong. But as I am, myself, of the priestly order, and bear an equal part and concern with others in the words of the Lord; as I take them for a lesson that suits my character, and which I repeat to myself, I shall not fear to make them hear the voice of the Lord, by addressing them in the words of the prophet Malachi: "And now, O ye priests, this commandment is to you." Mal. ii. I placed you in my church to edify and sanctify her; to your pastoral care I committed my flock; as your lips were the depositories of sacred knowledge, your works should have been the rule of sound morals and true piety. Yet, unfaithful to the strictest and most indispensable obligations, you deviated from the way which I pointed out to you, and which it was your duty to point out to others. By straying away voluntarily, you drew many others after you: "You have departed out of the way, and have caused many to stumble at the law." Mal. ii. And what is the consequence? Ah! Christians, what I should not dare to think, much less to declare, if God added not: "Therefore have I made you contemptible and base before all the people." Mal. ii. Your scandalous life, or, to speak more accurately, the scandals of your life, have lessened you in their esteem, and you are become the object of their reproaches and scoffs.

Is it not thus that so many ministers of the living God literally undergo the unfortunate destiny of that salt of the earth, with which Christ compared them? For, to what use (says our blessed Saviour) is salt applied, when once corrupted? It is trodden under

foot: "If salt lose its savour, it is good for nought but to be trodden on by men." Matt. v. And in truth, by a just punishment of the heavenly Lord, who will not have this evangelical metaphor to be a fruitless figure, and permits that the prediction pronounced by Malachi be visibly accomplished, what is there more contemptible in the whole universe than a scandalous priest? Heaven forbid, beloved hearers, that I should pretend, by this, to justify the contempt with which the churchmen are treated, or approve of the consequences you draw from their conduct. When I speak to you of scandals caused by God's ministers, it is not with a view to bring shame on them, but to give you instruction. I speak of them with a view to invalidate and hinder the pernicious effects of their evil doings, which might prove dangerous temptations, might disturb your minds, might shake your religion to the very foundation, and might give to libertinism a handle to exert his baneful influence. For I know full well what impression the life of a scandalous ecclesiastic is wont to make on the minds of men. I know how it helps to harden your hearts, and that their bad example, or, to speak more properly, your manner of reasoning on their morals and example, is one great obstacle you have to surmount in the way of salvation.

And now I shall close this important article with a moral inference: wo be to you, if you make Jesus Christ not indeed absolutely in his own person, but in that of his ministers, how unworthy soever they may be of their ministry, be the rueful cause of your taking scandal, as even in this sense it is true, that "happy is the man who shall not be scandalized in him!" Wo be to you, if you yield to this scandal, and if you suffer yourselves to be carried away by it, not guarding against its malignity and contagion! The reason of it is evident; for, the Saviour of the world, who could foresee all things, and provided against all things, hath furnished you with arms abundantly sufficient to oppose and condemn it; arms that will render you eternally inexcusable, if you do not use them. For, first, he hath admonished you, to the end you be prepared against all surprise, that scandals would come. Secondly, he hath specified the conduct to be observed, when those who are seated in the chair of Moses, are wanting in their duty, and give not the edification that is expected at their hands. He tells you that your duty, in such case, obliges you to mind the purity of their doctrine, not the corruption of

their manners; that you will be judged concerning the truths they shall announce, not the life they shall lead; that you should hear their words, not imitate their deeds; that you should obey their orders, not follow their example; that notwithstanding the irregularities, whether true or false, which are laid to their charge, being ministers of his word, and exercising, in his name, a power and authority derived from him, you are not permitted to use them contemptuously, as your contempt would refer to the master who sent them: "He that despiseth you, despiseth me." Luke x.

4thly. What shall I say now of those whom I suppose to be stedfast in the faith, having been nurtured in the bosom of the Catholic Church? Are they not inexcusable, since, instead of seconding the zeal of so many holy labourers, and contributing to reclaim from the paths of error, such of our brethren as have gone astray, or of confirming those, whose faith still wavers, even after their conversion, they help only, by their example, to alienate them from us, or to plunge them again into their former blindness? For, beloved hearers, it is our bad example, let us own it to our shame, that hinders such numbers, whom the circumstances of their birth have unfortunately separated from the Catholic communion, from sincerely returning within the pale of the church. For the difficulty they find in coming over to us, no cause is assignable with any propriety, but the immoral and disorderly life we lead, and the impiety discoverable in the very exercise of the worship we profess. If they saw us as sincere and fervent Catholics, as our duty and that name oblige us to be, they would speedily join with us in the unity of faith. What renders them more and more tenacious of their principles is, the monstrous contrast we give them room to observe between the faith we profess and our conduct in life. What must they think, when they see the manner in which we assist at the august sacrifice of the body of the Lord? Is not this alone sufficient to overturn the good disposition they have to believe in the reality of his presence? Doth not this alone (for so they explain themselves) make it doubtful to them, whether we believe it entirely ourselves, and whether it were not more eligible entirely to disbelieve it, than to render themselves culpable of such a profanation? Whatever show of zeal we may make for the extinction of schism, they will never be persuaded that we are thoroughly convinced of the presence of our God in his adorable sacrament, while they themselves see the

scandalous irreverences, which are committed in our churches, and in the face of the altar. Hence they bring objections and arguments against us, which affect them the more, as they are plain and obvious.

It is our duty, therefore, to put a stop to this scandal, a scandal with which heresy, maliciously, if you please, though perhaps not without some cause, hath at all times upbraided us. These are the means of bringing the work of God, with regard to our brethren, to a happy period; this is the violence, the amiable violence, which by the gospel law we are allowed to make use of, in the view of forcing them, if I may venture the expression, into the house of God. Let us edify them by our exemple, and without much reasoning we shall work their conversion. Let us show them, by our conduct, that there is a thorough conformity, between what we believe and what we practise, and they will not resist. Let our morals do honour to the faith we profess, and a just comportment and true piety to the grand mysteries of our religion. We should be induced thereunto by the motive alone which David proposes: "Lest the Gentiles should say, where is their God?" Ps. cxiii. And if he be present, where they openly profess a belief of his presence, why do not they pay there homage and adoration? Or, why do they daily assemble together, and seemingly prize themselves for a disrespectful, insolent, outrageous demeanour?

5thly. In fine, what shall I say of those persons who encourage godliness, and are faithful and assiduous in the practice of good works, but subject to weaknesses, and betray failings, of which, to the prejudice of good works and godliness, the libertine avails himself? For, the world, though impious and licentious in itself, expects that the servants of God be irreproachable; that the irregularity of their lives be proof against censure; and that their conduct be suitable to their profession. If in this they answer not the expectations of the world; if they discover frailties that are incident to others; if they be mere men, like others, and their piety be blended with ordinary foibles; if to pious practices they join inordinate passions, refined vengeance, interested views, ambitious schemes, a vivacity of temper, and hasty expressions: if a person addicted to devotion be observed to be nice and punctilious in a point of honour; to be jealous, avaricious, unjust, a slanderer, a double dealer: doth not this occasion a triumph for

the libertine, and, as it were, afford him a right of proscription? I know that the world, in decrying devotion, is frequently unjust. But, for that very reason, (replies St. Chrysostom,) those who are desirous of serving their God in spirit and in truth, should be more exact and more regular; should avoid with all diligence the shadow of a fault; and should, (according to the admonition of St. Paul,) by these means, shut the mouths of the impious. Thus, (says he,) addressing himself to the primitive Christians, shall our enemies have nothing to reproach us withal; thus shall not the name of the Lord be blasphemed, nor his worship disparaged; thus shall our religion, and the God of our religion, be glorified and magnified: "That the adversary may be afraid, having no evil to speak of us." Tit. ii.

To conclude, Christians, and to collect together in one point of view all the fruit to be drawn from these great truths. Let us be constantly on our guard against the scandal that may be given us; and still more, that we ourselves never scandalize others. Let us pray to God, daily, in the words of holy David: "Keep me from the stumbling-block of them that work iniquity." Ps. cxl. If we find that our neighbour be the occasion of our falling, let us adhere to the rules which our Saviour prescribes, sparing neither eye nor hand, if they give us scandal. Let us pull out the one, and cut off the other. That is, however contrary it may be to nature, let us part with what is nearest and dearest to us, rather than undergo the irretrievable and eternal loss of our souls. But let us beware, likewise, of leading our neighbour into the way of perdition; because by inducing him to associate in our ruin, we are doubly children of wrath.

And you, above all, whom God hath distinguished, and raised in the world, apply to yourselves this point of morality; and remember, that your great elevation and dignity make it your particular duty, and lay you under a greater obligation than common, of edifying the rest of mankind, as it is to be apprehended, that your bad example may have an uncommon degree of influence on the minds of the weak. For where is the man who hath strength sufficient to stem so violent and headlong a torrent? Call to mind these words of our blessed Saviour: "So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works;" (Matt. v.;) that, edified at your conduct, and treading in your footsteps, they may be happily guided to avoid evil, and still more

happily to do good. Never forget that it is incumbent on you to rid the world of the scandals that infest it, and that God, to that end, hath chosen you, and placed you over the heads of others. Ah! my Lord, that it is not in my power to do in this audience, and in this court, what the angels will do at the last judgment! One of your most peremptory mandates to them will be, that "they gather away all scandals out of your kingdom." Matt. xiii. That I cannot prevent them! That I cannot, by anticipation, prevent the orders you will then give them! That I cannot, to banish henceforward all scandal, deliver your church from all the authors of scandal! not like the exterminating angel, by reprobating them in your name, but as a minister of the gospel, by contributing to their amendment and their sanctification! It depends upon yourselves, beloved hearers, that my wishes be fulfilled. Your chief good is at stake, your most important concern, the salvation of your souls, and your eternal happiness.

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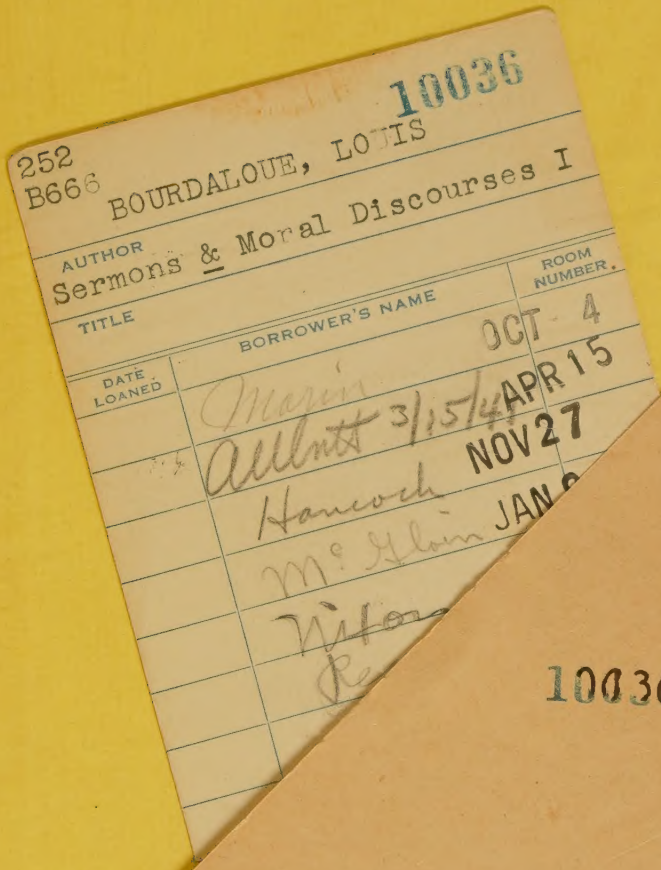
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